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A YELLOW ASTER

A YELLOW ASTER

BY

I O T A

“And if this fought-for climax is ever reached
“and science, creeping along the path of experiment,
“so invades the realm of Nature that a blue chrys-
“anthemum or A Yellow Aster can be produced at
“will, the question still remains, has Nature been
“made more beautiful thereby?”

IN THREE VOLUMES

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A YELLOW ASTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE stable-yard of Waring Park seemed to be slightly off its head on a certain fine afternoon in June. Such an afternoon as it was, so sweet and so soft, so full of fragrant sleepy haze, that any sound louder than the sing-song of a cricket must have distracted any ordinary nerve-possessing mortal.

On this particular afternoon however,

the sole occupants of the yard were the stable-boys, the groom's urchin, and the under-gardener's lad, and as none of these had yet reached the level of nerves, whilst the blood of all of them throbbed with the greed for illegal sport in every shape, their state of lazy content was in no way upset by a medley of blood-curdling shrieks, squeals, and gobbles that issued from the throats of a little boy and a big turkey which the boy was swinging round and round by the tail, from the vantage ground of a large smooth round stone, with an amount of strength that was preternatural, if one had judged by the mere length of him and had not taken into consideration the enormous development of the imp's legs and arms.

The stable-boys grinned, and smoked like furnaces as the show proceeded, and

the other two cheered like Trojans, in the cruelty of the natural boy, and it might have gone badly for the turkey, if there had not swooped down upon him and his tormentor, just in the nick of time, a little lean wiry woman, armed with an authority, which even the imp, after one spasmodic struggle, saw best not to gainsay.

“Master Dacre, whatever do you do it for? Do you think the bird has no feelings? There is no sense in such goings-on.”

“There is sense,” spluttered the boy at full speed, “I like bein’ swung and I like swingin’ the turkey, and I’ll learn him to like it too, and if he don’t learn that anyway he’ll learn something else, which is life’s discerpline, which father

says I'm learnin' when you whip me. If I want it, so does the turkey and wuss. I b'longs to higher orders nor beasts and birds."

Here the grins of the stable-boys broke into hoarse guffaws, and Mary's ire culminated in a sharp rebuke all round.

"Go to your work, you idle fellows. I told your father long ago, Jim, what 'ud be the latter end of you. As for you, Robert, I could cry when I think of your blessed mother!

"And what business have you in the yard," she cried, turning on the two younger sinners. "Be off with you this instant. 'Tis easy to see none of the men are about. You two, Jim and Robert, you'd be surprised yourselves if you could see what soft idiots you look

with them stumps of pipes between your jaws.

“Look, Master Dacre, look at the bird’s tail. Haven’t you any heart at all? The creature might have been through the furze covert—”

“There’s not a feather broke,” said the boy, after a critical survey, “not one; I believe that tail were made for swingin’ as much as my arms was.”

For an instant words failed Mary and she employed herself hushing the bird into his pen. When she came back, Dacre had disappeared, and the yard seemed to be quite clear of human life, not to be traced even by the smell of shag tobacco.

Pursuit was useless, as Mary very well knew, so she returned to her nursery a

good deal down at heart, muttering and murmuring as she went.

“Oh Lord, whatever is to be the end of it all? Learning is the ruin of the whole place, and yet them children is as ignorant as bears, excepting for their queer words and ways. Set them to read a Royal Reader or to tot up a sum, bless you, they couldn’t for the life of them. And the tempers of the two,” she went on, putting the cross stitches on a darn, “their parents had no hand in them anyway. Where they got ’em from the Lord only knows. Tempers, indeed! And from them two blessed babies as bore ’em.” She lifted her head and glanced out of the window.

“Look at ’em,” she whispered, “hand in hand up and down the drive, talking

mathematics, I'll be bound," and Mary's eyes returned to her basket a trifle moist. She had nursed Mrs. Waring and Mrs. Waring's children, and she was a good soul with a deal of sentiment about her.

As it happened, Mr. and Mrs. Waring were not discussing mathematics. They were just then deeply and solemnly exercised in their minds as to the exact date of a skeleton recently unearthed from some red sandstone in the neighbourhood. They had dismissed the carriage at the hall gates, and were now hot in argument concerning the bones, each holding diametrically opposed views on the subject, and struggling hard to prove his or her side.

Now and again the husband's voice

rose to a pretty high pitch, and his fine mouth was touched with a sneer, and the wife's eyes flashed and flamed and shot out indignant wrath. Her hat had fallen off far down the drive, and her rings of yellow fluffy hair fell wildly over her forehead, one small hand was clenched in eager protest, but the other was clasped tight in her husband's.

They always went like this, these two; they had got into the foolish way very early in their acquaintance and had never been able to get out of it.

Suddenly some common hypothesis struck them both at once, and Mrs. Waring cried out with a gasp,

"If we can prove it, I am right."

"Yes, if you can prove it, darling, that's the point, and I hope that you never will. Have you any idea, dear love, what the proving of this will undo, what it must upset?"

"I think I have." she said slowly, her blue eyes gleaming eagerly, "but it seems to me whenever a great hubbub is made about the upsetting of some theory, that it generally ends in being much ado about nothing, and that the new thing that springs from the ashes of the old dead, is infinitely more beautiful than ever its predecessor was, for it is one step nearer the truth."

"Dearest, we must end our talk," groaned Mr. Waring, peering with terrified looks through his eyeglasses. "Here is Gwen, most slightly clad and of a

bright blue tint, pursued by Mary. I fear very much that story of Boadicea you told her has instigated her to this action. I think, dearest, I will go to the study and work out this question of date."

Mr. Waring turned nervously and made a gentle effort to disengage his hand from his wife's, but she clutched him firmly. "Henry," she cried, "you would not desert me?"

"Oh, my dear," he gasped, "what can I do? The child must be cleansed and, I presume, punished. I can be of no use," and he still showed signs of flight, but the horror-stricken eyes of his wife, fixed pleadingly on him, made him waver and wait.

By a superhuman effort Mary got up first.

“Oh, ma’am,” she shrieked in tones that went through Mrs. Waring’s head, “Oh, ma’am, look at her! I found her with nothing on but this rag and some leaves, painted blue, and varnished—varnished, sir, eating acorns outside of the orchard fence. It’s common indecency, ma’am, and if it’s to continue I can’t”—

By this time Gwen had arrived, desperately blown, but overflowing with words; rather an advantage under the circumstances, for her parents had not one between them.

“Mother, I were a woaded Briton and blue all over. Mag Dow did me behind and I done the front, and it aren’t common naked if queens done it like you said. She did, Mary, say it Thursday when she begun the history course. Dacre was

to be a woaded king too, but he were a beast and wouldn't do nothing but swing turkeys for discerpline."

"Mary, I think perhaps you should give Miss Gwen a bath, and then we will consider what further course to take."

Mrs. Waring caught her skirts nervously and drew a step nearer to her husband.

"A bath, ma'am! Don't you see she's painted and varnished, no water'll touch that, ma'am, turpentine it must be and cart grease, not to say paraffin,—and, ma'am, the indecency!"

"Please, Mary," implored the tortured woman, "oh, please take her away and put the cart grease on—and—the other things, and we can then talk over the rest."

Here the light of a sudden inspiration leapt into her face, and she turned to her husband. "Henry," she said solemnly, "do you not think that Gwen should go to bed? She seems to me," she continued, taking a critical survey of the blue-daubed figure, "she seems to me a little old for such very peculiar adaptations of history."

"To bed," remarked the husband infinitely relieved. It seemed quite a happy solution to the whole question, and must fulfil every purpose,—be Gwen's Nemesis, a salve to Mary's hurt morality, and a merciful deliverance to all others concerned. "Yes, a very sensible suggestion of yours, dearest. I consider that it would be a most salutary measure to send Gwen to bed."

“Indeed, sir,” remarked Mary, without a particle of the satisfaction that might have been expected from her, “Miss Gwen will be fit for no other place by the time I’ve done with her, what with the paraffin and the scrubbing and her skin that tender. Oh come, Miss, come away,” she cried grimly, laying hold of Gwen.

“Grace, my darling,” said Mr. Waring, passing his free hand wearily over his brow, “such scenes as these are indeed upsetting. I am quite unable to take up the thread of our discourse.”

“I feel as you do, Henry,” said his wife sadly, “we seem to have so very little time to ourselves.”

“Do you think, Grace, we should procure a tutor for those children? Let me see, how old are they?”

"I have their ages down somewhere in my tablets," said Mrs. Waring rummaging in her pocket, and producing a little book of ivory tablets. She consulted it anxiously.

"Just fancy!" she exclaimed with astonished eyes, "Dacre will be seven in April—I had no idea he was so old—and I see Gwen is just twelve months younger."

"I think their physical powers are now fairly developed—indeed, I am of opinion that the boy's development will continue to be mainly physical; he will, I fear, run much to cricket and other brutal sports. But no doubt he has some small amount of brain power that should be made the most of. We must now get someone who will undertake this business for us, dear love."

“Ah,” said his wife plaintively, “the feeding and physical care of children seems a terrible responsibility; it weighs upon my life. But the development of their intellectual powers!—I wish the time for it had kept off just a little longer, until we were farther on in our last, our best work. And if,” she said wearily, “you think the brain power of Dacre, at least, is so insignificant, the task becomes Herculean.”

“We must consult the rector, dear.”

“I feel in some way we must have failed in our duty. The grammar that child spoke was appalling, as was also the intonation of her words. I wonder how this has come to pass? I should have thought her mere heredity would have saved us this.”

Mrs. Waring sighed heavily, fate seemed against her, even heredity was playing her false.

"It is shocking, dear, but accountable," said her husband soothingly, "you are disturbed, and forget how widely modified heredity becomes by conditions. If I recollect aright Gwen mentioned one—Mag—h'm, Dow. Children are imitative creatures. And now, with regard to another matter. I think, dear love, it were wiser if you discontinued that proposed course of history. The imagination of our daughter Gwen must not be fostered until it has a sounder intellectual basis to work up from."

"Very well, dear," and Mrs. Waring sighed a sigh of relief. No one but herself knew the horrible embarrassment of

having those two children sitting opposite to her and glaring all over her, while she discoursed to them on the customs of the early Britons, and it was only a consuming sense of duty that had seized on her, and forced her to the task.

CHAPTER II.

Not only the entire county of —shire but even the whole University of Cambridge had been thrown into quite a whirl of emotion by the marriage of Henry Waring and Grace Selwyn, the most unexpected ever concocted in heaven or on earth.

A Senior Wrangler and a Fellow of his college, who at twenty-six, eats, drinks, and sleeps mathematics, besides being possessed of other devouring passions for

certain of the minor sciences, does not seem a very fit subject for matrimony with its petty follies and cares.

If one is, besides, the son of a cynic and a bookworm, who loathed and eschewed the sex with bitter reason, and whose own practical knowledge had been gained chiefly through the classics and the bedmakers, the one of which appeals but little to one's sense of propriety, the other still less to one's fleshly sense, the prospect of a domestic and patriarchal career must seem as remote as it is undesirable.

And yet Henry Waring found himself, to his constant and increasing bewilderment, embarked on one almost before he altogether knew where he was.

The year previous to his marriage he had suffered a good deal from ennui. A

favourite theory in geology over which he had peered himself half blind, was suddenly exploded without hope of reconstruction. He felt rather lost and *distrain*, and cast about for some tangible solid brainwork.

But to pass the time until the fresh inspiration came on, he took to propounding stray problems, and—through the press—launching them broadcast over the land. Strange to say, he got answers, and by the score. A good many more “mute inglorious Solons” infest our villages than we have any notion of.

Mr. Waring groaned in spirit and mourned over the depravity of the race as he read their epistles, and drew farther back than ever into his shell. If the average man and woman without the academical walls resem-

bled these productions, the less one had to do with them the better, he very reasonably reflected.

After this had been going on for the space of three months, he came, one morning, down to breakfast. He felt very sick at heart; his pupils seemed so amazingly full of enthusiasm for minor concerns, and so absolutely lacking in it for the one thing needful, that he was cut to the quick and moved to much gentle wrath. And then these letters! They were fast becoming his Nemesis.

He ate his breakfast and watched with unwonted pleasure some dust motes dancing in a sunbeam, and raising his eyes to follow them, they unconsciously strayed farther out into the college quad, where the dew was still sparkling on every

grass blade, and shimmering on every flower.

Mr. Waring felt quite cheerful and revived as he pushed away his plate and cup and began to open his letters. Letter after letter was laid down, a spasm of pain passing each time across his face, and more than once an audible groan escaped him.

At last he picked up a letter gingerly, as he handled all this variety of correspondence—the village mathematician being an unclean beast—but this letter seemed somehow different, he turned it over with growing interest, and even took the pains to examine the postmark, then he opened it and found a quite different production from any he had yet received.

First on opening it a curious indefinite

scent struck on his nostrils. He sniffed it up perplexedly; some queer old memories began to stir in him, and he paused a moment to try and classify them, but he could not, so he set himself to examine the contents of the missive.

The answer given to his problem was accurate and the accompanying remarks clear, strong, and to the point, written in a woman's hand and signed with a woman's name, "Grace Selwyn".

That letter was answered before the breakfast things were cleared away, and certain fresh problems enclosed which were not sent in any other direction.

Many letters went and came after that, containing problems and their answers, the answers always full of that strange, vague, delicious scent, which seemed to

waft itself through the study and to remain there, caught with the dust motes in the sunbeam.

A longing and a yearning for those little notes began to take possession of Henry Waring and to disturb his mind. Old memories of the time when he wore frocks and toddled, began to haunt him, and his work was no longer done by reflex action.

He consulted a doctor, but as he only confided half his symptoms to that scientific person, quite suppressing the letters, the doctor felt rather out of it and prescribed quinine, which had no effect whatsoever.

One morning the yearning for a letter grew suddenly quite overmastering; and none came. This was the climax. By a

sudden impulse which he never succeeded in explaining to himself on any satisfactory grounds, Mr. Waring went to his bedroom, knelt down by his big chest of drawers, and proceeded to pack a little valise with every article he did not want, leaving out all those he did. Then he stepped into a cab and made for the station.

Towards the close of the day he presented himself at the door of a queer old red-brick manor house in Kent owned by a Colonel Selwyn and his wife, and asked simply for "Miss Grace Selwyn".

In three months from that day the two came down the path hand in hand and stepped out together on life's journey, and six months later through the death of a cousin, Waring Park fell to them and made up for the loss of the Fellowship.

CHAPTER III.

THE very day after Gwen's flight into history Mr. and Mrs. Waring walked up to the Rectory and got through their talk with the master of it.

They might not have been altogether so prompt, being still absorbed body and soul in the skeleton, but that, not only was Gwen suffering tortures from the state of her skin through the combined action of paint, paraffin, and other unguents,

but into the bargain she had caught a bad and a quite abnormally noisy cold, which kept her presence *en evidence* by fits and starts whenever she broke loose from the nursery, and which was a weapon judiciously wielded by Mary to keep her parents well up to the mark.

They had delivered themselves to Mr. Fellowes, and were now walking down the Rectory drive, both looking a little pained. Mr. Waring's disengaged hand was pressed to his forehead and his brows were knit, and Mrs. Waring looked as if she were engaged in a silent struggle against disturbing thoughts.

The air was still and soft, and some stray stars had already taken possession of the evening sky, where the little streaks

of rose, left by the sun, looked quite out of place, and felt it too, seemingly, for they were creeping behind the hills with a soft little shiver of dismay, like a timid guest who suddenly discovers that every soul but himself has left.

The silence and the calm helped Mr. and Mrs. Waring, who were both trying to throw off the consideration of minor matters and to return to that of vital affairs. Generally so easy, like the slipping back of a pair of seals into the water after a rugged land journey, tonight this seemed a strangely hard task to tackle.

They often seemed to receive the same impression at the same moment, and something or other in the bright glow of the Rectory study and in the perfectly at-home

and at-ease air of a pair of twins that the Rector's wife had temporary charge of, and had brought in to say good-night, had given them a little jar which would keep on quivering.

These were not sufficiently tangible sensations for discussion, there seemed nothing in them that these two persons could seize upon and argue from to any purpose, so they were struggling to put them behind them. Mr. Waring succeeded, his wife was not so fortunate.

The vague feeling was quite like a Jack-in-the-box for sudden appearances during the next few days, and whenever it sprang up, a little ache followed hot on the heels of it.

At last she made a supreme effort to

regain her reason, and remarked with rather deceptive cheerfulness,

“I think, dearest, we may now dismiss this matter from our minds. I am quite willing to trust it in Mr. Fellowes’ hands, as I presume you are. You do feel perfect confidence in him?” she questioned a little anxiously, as Mr. Waring did not speak for a moment.

“Darling, yes!” he said with a start, “in this matter certainly yes, this is quite within his *rôle*, I do not think we could find a wiser helper or counsellor. And he is so thoroughly a gentleman, he so kindly waived his theological objections when he found that on this part of the question we had both arrived at a fixed conclusion. Yes, in the choice of a tutor we could desire no better adviser.

At the moment you spoke I was speculating upon Fellowes from another point of view; I am really quite astonished that a man so advanced in some phases of thought should be so limited so—almost retrograde—in others, and above all, so strangely content with his life, with hardly a moment in it for undisturbed reflection, and no moment at all for any attempt at valuable work. I cannot imagine either where he finds companionship.”

He paused to sigh. “We have so little time, love, to give to him, time is so very much to us. Our other neighbours seem to hunt when they do not fish and fish when they do not hunt, they can have neither time nor strength left for intellectual culture. Then Mr. and Mrs. Fellowes have,

I believe, duties; they sit on Boards and Councils and no doubt follow other pursuits of like order, but as companions, naturally they must be impossible. Then as to his wife, she is a comely person—she is, is she not, dearest? I am so very poor a judge—but I do not perceive any glimmerings of thought in her. You can better judge of her, dear, have you ever discovered any?”

Mrs. Waring considered for a moment then she shook her head.

“I do not think I have expected any,” she said, “so indeed I have hardly looked. I have only thought of her kindness, and of her knowledge of children and their feeding. I am very fond of her and so very grateful, but I have never once really talked to her.”

“I thought so—it is strange—strange. However, I am most thankful this business is done, we may now be able to begin those papers to-night—I look forward with much pleasure to them. Curious what very opposed views we take on this subject—h’m, I fancy I am right, dear.”

Mrs. Waring thought not, and signified the fact by a very decided shake of her sweet golden locks, that looked more like spun silver in the moon’s rays.

They had now reached the great flight of steps that flanked either side of the entrance door.

When they got to the top, by one accord they paused, and leant over the castellated ivy-clad wall that protected the platform of granite slabs connecting

the two flights of steps, and gazed out into the evening, but a sudden horrible sound made Mrs. Waring jump nervously, then quiver from head to foot, and caused her husband's brows to contract as sharply as if there had been a spring in them.

It turned out to be Gwen scraping an old violin and coughing frightfully all down the corridor.

"Dearest, do you think we should summon Dr. Guy?" said Mr. Waring when they had somewhat recovered.

"Oh no, love, Mary assures me there is no danger whatever, she calls that dreadful noise 'a simple stomach cough'."

"In that case we must request Mary to keep her in the nursery, such noises are most upsetting. Pray be as quick as you can, my darling, we might get to

work at once. But surely it is not the gong I hear?"

"Love, I fear it is only too true," cried Mrs. Waring in trembling distress. "I had no idea of the lateness of the hour, and oh, Henry, we were late again yesterday and the servants were quite upset. Oh, you will be quick with your dressing, will you not?"

Then with one last little hand-squeeze she fled to her room with a terrified glance into the solemn face of a hurt-looking footman.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN he had bidden farewell to the Warings in his porch and watched them curiously till a clump of firs hid them from him, Mr. Fellowes went back to his study with a very curious assortment of expressions on his face; there was a good deal of amusement there, a decided touch of sadness, much doubt, and some dismay.

He had, however, little time to reduce this confusion to order; an impatient tap

at the door was followed by the entrance of a bright eager little woman, in a long trailing garment of a curious combination of heliotrope and pale yellow.

"John, are you ready for me? May I hear all of it?" she demanded, putting her little hand on his big ones.

"I feel in rather a yeasty condition at this minute, but I'll subside shortly, no doubt. Will you be able to hold out a little longer?"

"Haven't I borne it for two mortal hours and twenty minutes? Were they talking all the time? I was in an awful fright it was something I mustn't hear. Two scientists in trouble about their souls, perhaps?"

"Fortunately I can divulge all I know, but you needn't be flippant. It's all very

funny, but it's just as woefully sad. What on earth are you at?"

"Pinning up my skirts, the fire would ruin this colour in a night. Do you like my gown?"

"I do, but whether the parish will, is another question."

"Oh, never mind the parish, I'll teach it; you have no idea how easy it is to get round people if you know the track. Is that yeast risen high enough or has it gone sad? Remember I have held out a frightful time."

"Hold out another five minutes while I write a note, I must catch this post."

When Mr. Fellowes brought his little seventeen-years old wife home to the respectable parish of Waring, just four years before this time, it was the generally

received opinion of most competent judges that he had a good deal to answer for.

To begin with, she was American, that fact in itself was quite without precedent. The entire clerical annals of the diocese did not furnish a like example. This, to any right-minded judgment, was as much as an insult to the parishioners, who were in consequence put to much trouble and inconvenience in rubbing up their imaginations to tackle the case, having no previous experience to go upon.

A deceased Colonel, of whom they knew a great deal too much, and a living peer, of whom on the contrary, they knew a great deal too little, both inhabitants of the county, had indeed

married Americans, the results in the one case being disastrous; of the other they possessed no proven data, but they were at least at liberty to draw their own conclusions.

But for a parson to do this thing! It was unheard-of, and partook of the nature of a scandal.

Then Mrs. Fellowes was pretty and gay, and it must be confessed *chic*.

They could have put up with the prettiness and even the brightness,—they were used to certain varieties of both these things in their own girls,—but the *chicness*!—that was the quality their souls struck against, it seemed expressly to have been sent by Satan himself “to buffet them withal”. And the girl’s dress for a clergyman’s wife, was simply

audacious! And yet when a large and representative female conclave had met and dissected her "things" over half a dozen teas, they were forced to the conclusion that she had not a complex or expensive article in her whole wardrobe.

"So much the worse," Lady Mary, the leader of the parish *ton*, remarked, and with some reason too, "it shows that it is not the clothes that stamp the girl, it is the girl who stamps the clothes. There is something fundamentally wrong there."

This being put in the form of an axiom spread widely, and carried much weight.

This was four years ago, however, and things had changed a good deal. Mrs. Fellowes' husband was no fool,

he knew what he was about when he brought home, as the finish to the one long holiday of his life, the little New England girl to be his helpmate.

CHAPTER V.

“Now, Ruth,” said Mr. Fellowes when he had finished and despatched his note, and, lighting a cigarette, settled himself in his armchair opposite to her, “I’ll yield you up all I know. It was the queerest interview I ever had with that queer pair.—You needn’t wriggle with anticipation, my dear, no human creature could reproduce the scene with any justice to himself or to his subject.—Waring had

most palpably put on for the occasion a brisk man-of-the-world air that was superb, but his wife seemed dreamier than ever, and limper, and her hat looked rather askew."

"It always does, but do go on."

"Directly you give me a chance, dear. Waring opened the campaign with a little small talk as he always does, but it was quite off-hand and reckless to-day. He had hardly set his gentle tap fairly flowing however, when his wife suddenly woke up and chipped in with quite phenomenal clearness and precision,

"‘Dear Henry, suppose we state the object of our call, we can converse afterwards.’

"Then it all came out. First one stated a fact or a theory then the other had his

innings. It was hard enough to follow the two and to watch them at the same time; one never likes to miss the moment when they clasp hands again and the little looks they cast on each other in the process. It appears the pair meditate a definite experiment on those wretched children, and want my help in securing a bear-leader for the task."

"Good gracious!" gasped Mrs. Fellowes. "Go on," she commanded grimly, "what is it?"

"On no account whatever is either to be sent to school or allowed to hold intercourse with other children; no woman is to have any hand in their tuition; naturally, cricket, football, and every other boyish sport is to be carefully excluded from the curriculum, and all

Christian teaching is to be utterly tabooed."

"Mercy on us!"

"The facts of the Old Testament are to be imparted to them with other ancient history, and they are to be well instructed in the natural sciences. By these means they will learn to know God in His Works—with a capital 'W'—Mrs. Waring observed this solemnly to her husband for my benefit. 'Exactly, my darling,' he replied, with a most surprising alacrity—they had rehearsed this point, those two babies.—When the children are launched into their teens and have presumably arrived at an age of more or less discretion, the Bible and any other existing evidences of Christianity obtainable, are to be formally presented to them. The imps may then receive these or reject them

according to their particular turn of mind, but in no case are they to be biased.

“The parents have seemingly occupied themselves a good deal with this part of the experiment and regard this presentation of a choice of beliefs as a sort of function on which they mean to take exhaustive observation.”

The rector paused to roll another cigarette; when he had finished and lighted it, he went on.

“Ruth, you are an intelligent woman and won’t misjudge me when I say, that this experiment in itself seems to be a reasonable one.

“This Bible-reading question is an awful one,” he went on, musing aloud, “we all have had, every decent English

man, woman, and child of us has had the Bible religiously drilled into him from the time of consciousness till whatever time he can manage to read it for himself, then he is exhorted to carry on the exercise independently, and a good percentage of people do; you'd be astonished at the number of people who never miss reading their Bible every day of their lives, and perhaps more astonished still if you were to know the amazingly small effect it has on the lives of these people. Even from an intellectual point of view, it is incredible to me how little the average human being has grasped the heritage he possesses in this book.

"I was speaking to a girl the other day—by far the most intelligent one I know in these regions—she was talking

to me with perfect unrestraint and frankness about all sorts of things. She told me she could see no beauty whatsoever in the Bible, and that she had never been able to derive an atom of encouragement or assurance from anything in it. If it did not bore, it upset her, and made belief harder. It had become a mere patter to her by vile reading and intonation, and the remarkable turns of thought given to it by many minds insulted her reason. Even the poetry of the diction had been spoilt for her and seemed, she said, to reek of half-fledged curates.—Under some conditions this experiment of the Warings might prove a success.”

“Oh, but with that mother!”

“Ah, yes, that alters the whole aspect

of affairs! If you could only have heard the passionless, analytical style in which Waring and his wife discussed the matter and speculated on the issue, which they think will be more typical in Gwen than in Dacre, his brute strength being, in their opinion, his strong point, and his theological side hardly worth considering. They throw it in, however, 'careless like' as, if the experiment is to be tried, it is just as easy to try it on two as on one."

"Mercy on us," again said Mrs. Fellowes, clattering the fire-irons viciously.

"By the way, Waring amused me intensely by one revelation he made, he could hardly get it out, and I saw him fling a pathetically-deprecating glance at his wife and give her hand a squeeze before

he began. He felt he had to account for the luckless Dacre's strength of legs, of which he seems to have as poor an opinion as the Psalmist, he feared I might fall into the error of casting the blame on him or his wife, so he determined I should know the real cause. 'You will hardly believe me,' he observed, 'when I tell you that my wife with her refined intellectuality is the outcome of long generations of soldiers and of—ahem,—famous duellists, and I fear our son, Dacre, is a very clearly-defined specimen of throwing-back.' Poor Mrs. Waring! she felt her ancestry keenly and got as red as a rose during the confession."

"Goodness gracious me! What a woman! what a pair! What in the name of goodness brought the two together and made

them marry each other and produce children. If I were Providence and had that on my mind, I'd never look up again."

"My dear child!"

"John, in the present state of my feelings, brought on by you yourself recollect, you must forget your sacerdotal character and only remember my state of original sin. Why should two beautiful children's lives be spoilt for the vagaries of a pair who never had any right to bear children? Think of Gwen's sad old face full of the trouble of all ages, think of her naughtiness with that horrible unique sort of infernal touch about it; that painting herself blue is the most childish escapade I remember.

"I was at Mrs. Doyle's yesterday

and she was telling me a lot about Mrs. Waring before we came. After Dacre's birth, she said it was absolutely ghastly to see her with the child, she was terrified to hold it, and trembled like a leaf whenever she absolutely had to. Poor Mrs. Doyle, she got quite irritated and excited about one thing; it seems she could not nurse her own children at all, and that Mrs. Waring was a capital mother from that point of view, and Mrs. Doyle seemingly could not see at all why an unnatural little bundle of scientific data should score off her, a good wholesome creature made for a mother, in this manner."

"It was certainly too bad, and one would never have expected it of Mrs. Waring," said the rector laughing.

“Oh, and whenever Mary brought either of the babies to her or she met them in the corridors or about the grounds, Mrs. Doyle says her one request was that Mary should take the creature away and give it food, it looked faint! They were both huge, flourishing, healthy babies, I hear.”

“Ruth,” said Mr. Fellowes suddenly, “I wish those people would keep away from church.”

“You are shedding your sacerdotal character with a vengeance! What do you mean?”

“You have no idea how they distract me, sitting there together with their eyes far away and their ears sealed, except at the odd times they give those spasmodic simultaneous starts, and twist

their thoughts back for the minute to what's going on."

"But, John, for the sake of the parish—"

"If the parish can't keep up to its ordinary pretty low water-mark without this prick to its piety it must be in a poor state, and even more of a discredit to me than I imagine. They are far too good to be asked to play this weekly farce for the parish's sake. It was Hopkins, not I, who insisted upon this church-going and of course they gave in in their gracious simple way; and now, not even a water spout would stop them from coming, they are so concerned for my feelings. What a pair of unconscious Christians they are to be sure! One sees it cropping up in all directions."

"I wish it would appear anyway in the management of their children, I don't see many traces of it there. When is this wretched experiment to be set going?" asked Mrs. Fellowes.

"As soon as I can procure a suitable person to conduct it. I think I know a fellow who might do."

"What business have they with children, those two?" cried Mrs. Fellowes with a little spasm of pain twisting about her mouth. "I don't believe those children ever got properly hugged in all their lives by that inhuman little mother of theirs. And oh, Gwen's dress! That is awful!"

"Ah, yes, that makes the whole affair very much sadder! Don't you think dinner is ready? Yes, those children have a great

deal to fight against, it isn't their ancestors alone that will handicap them, poor little beggars."

"Cartloads of saints for ancestors wouldn't be worth a rap to them with an eerie little creature like that for a mother," said Mrs. Fellowes hotly, in the pretty lazy drawl into which her touch of twang had developed itself. "I pity that wretched coming tutor."

She let her skirts drop and gave them a dexterous kick as she went out, to give them the correct "hang".

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was no time lost in setting the experiment going, and it was soon in full swing. Its birth pangs were awful, and embraced in their throes a great number of persons. The parents' sufferings were so complex and so quite peculiar to themselves that it is impossible to expound them to an unsympathizing public.

The tortures that couple endured during the first few months after the initial

stage of intellectual development had been instituted and was being dealt with, were severe, but they were in no wise connected with their children's anguish at the sudden and unexpected onslaught on their higher parts.

Their misery arose chiefly from the jarring and inconveniently close contact with tutors, whom, in their unconscious Christian way, they found it their duty to admit for some part of every day into the edge of their lives. This was a terrible discipline, more especially as during these times the unhappy instructors also thought it their duty to ease off their slough of learning and to expand their social parts, and thus the manufacture of small talk became a daily necessity in the lives of the distracted pair.

They had both taken infinite pains to provide silent entertainment for their guests—or rather succession of guests—in the tutoring line. The standard scientists were first tried, and these seeming to have but little effect, a whole cartload of mixed literature, including all the rag-tag and bobtail of fiction the bookseller wanted to get off his hands, was imported and spread about enticingly; theology and ethics were also given a show, till at last all the tables at one side of the room were spotted with slate, yellow, and dull blues and browns, and every form of journal from the *Times* to the *Police News* was scattered broadcast over the place, all with a view to lay hold on the tutorial mind and keep it independent of its entertainers.

Directly the tutor for the time being, entered at his appointed hour, they rose simultaneously from their work, as if the same spring moved them, hurried towards him with outstretched hands, sat down side by side facing him, and broke into conversation, which if gaspy, and at times inconsequent, from the sudden upheaval of waves of thought in one or other of them, was kept up with gallant relentless-ness till the period of detention was at an end.

As soon as the clock announced this event, they broke off suddenly with a click, and the tutor was, so to speak, shot out, and the rent he had made in the lives of his entertainers was patched up as well as might be for that day.

But during the entire first course of those tutors, Mr. and Mrs. Waring felt always as if they were suffering from ragged edges.

As for Gwen and Dacre, their first taste of reclamation from the savage state, was bitter, sudden, and condign. Civilization seems the last thing in the world capable of soothing the savage breast, especially if the savage who owns it is young and in rude health.

Then Mary suffered. It was a hard blow to find her fledglings torn from her in one fell stroke, and only allowed to return at odd moments for repairs to skin and clothes.

Poor Mrs. Fellowes fretted herself into a regular feverish attack.

As for the tutors themselves, the less

said of their sufferings the better. Three succumbed to them in four months.

The one that followed, a most excellent person and cut out for a family man, broke off his engagement for fear of consequences, his slight substratum of scientific knowledge having got so much stirred up while at Waring Park, that he grew bewildered.

If such results as he had to deal with, he reflected, were to be seen in the green tree what might not come to pass in the dry? And he was well aware of the cloudy ancestry of his lady-love, and on his own side had not very much to boast of. It was unfortunate. But it certainly did seem sacrilegious impertinence in him to attempt what his betters had so egregiously failed in.

CHAPTER VII.

MANY tutors had come and gone, and much had been endured both from the children's point of view and from that of the instructors.

But time went on unheeding, and Gwen and Dacre were lying under an old cherry-tree in the orchard one day late in August.

The sun shone aslant through the crimson-tinted leaves above them, and threw

flickering rosy shadows across the faces of the two as they lay there in the cool grass, with wisps of fern under their heads for pillows.

Dacre, however, seemed to benefit but little from this arrangement; his head was oftener off its support than on; he twisted and turned and wriggled and plunged, even his toes moved visibly through his thick boots.

He was supposed to be reading, and kept up the pretence from time to time, but the words conveyed no sense to his restless eyes, that moved as if they were on wires. Now and again he got irritated and threw the book down with a snort.

The sister and brother spent much of their time together nowadays; fate had

perhaps quite as much to do with this close companionship as inclination, the groom's boy and his like, except at stolen moments, being for Dacre things of the past.

This and various other reforms had been brought about by Mr. Fellowes and one tutor of an exceptionally strong mind.

While Dacre wriggled, his sister lay quite still on her back with her legs stretched out, and with a considerable reach of stocking visible between the edge of her frock and her shoes. She had one arm curled round her neck with the sharp elbow stuck out uncompromisingly in Dacre's direction. It was useful as a buffer and saved her many a lunge. The other hand held a book, a queer old

edition of Elia, which she was deeply sunk in until she fell to watching Dacre with a look of curious mockery on her red curled lips.

"I'd give my eyes to go to school!" burst out the boy after an interval of comparative silence. Mutterings never counted in Dacre.

"So you have said six times this afternoon, not to mention the mutters," said the girl, "what do you want to go to school for?"

"You know without any telling."

"I want to hear again."

"To jeer at a fellow, I suppose?"

"I won't jeer, and I might help you," she said with a laugh.

He looked at her face dubiously, it was inscrutable enough, but the mockery had left her lips.

"I want to go, I hate to be here, Greggs is a big enough fool but not quite so much as the others, he ain't all bad, I'll say that. But what's he to other boys and cricket and football and larks—oh, you know!"

"I wonder why on earth they let you read *Tom Brown* when such heaps of books are forbidden," said Gwen reflectively. "They have brought all this on themselves," she added, knitting her brows in the exact manner of her mother. "We have to bear what we earn, we hear that often enough, I don't see why they shouldn't apply it to themselves. Dacre, you're an awful ass, if I wanted all those things I should have had them long ago."

"All very well to say that," grunted the boy, "I'd like to know how."

"I'll tell you,—I'd worry till I got them."

"I worry pretty well as it is," he said with a self-satisfied grin.

"Yes, in a stupid squally way—you get into a rage and make a row and an ass of yourself generally, then you get punished and repent, or pretend to,—anyway nothing is heard of you till the next bout. You might be a dead cat for all the importance you are—of course you're forgotten, and they go on working in peace.

"Now if I wanted a thing and wanted it badly I should take good care never to be forgotten; I should let them see there was to be no peace as long as I was in the house; I should make myself felt from the garrets to the kitchen; I

should gain my end," she concluded with calm finality.

By this time the sun had forsaken their tree and had flickered on to one nearer the west, and in the evening light her face gleamed out almost ghastly in its pallor.

"Gwen, you're queerer and queerer! Why don't you do all this for yourself? You are quiet enough now, nothing only sulky, why don't you do what you say I ought to, yourself?"

"For what?" was the sharp retort. "I don't want boys and cricket and football and larks."

"What do you want then?"

She jumped up from her pillow and looked out after the westering sun, her eyes dark and dilated, her red lips parted.

"What do I want?" she slowly repeated, "I want—oh, you would not understand what I want, but worrying won't get it."

She caught up her book again and threw herself face downwards on the sward.

"That's the way! You'll never tell me anything," said Dacre angrily.

"I'll tell you one thing, and that's I'll help you to go to school, and you'll go if you aren't a common ass, and if you'll do all I tell you."

"Golly! I'll do anything in the world for you if you'll only get me out of this hole," he blurted out in a spluttering fit of gratitude. "Perhaps, even, I might help you to get what you want, if you didn't make such a deadly secret of it," he added

looking at her as if he might somehow extract it from her unawares.

But her lips were tightly shut and her eyes looked dead and cold.

“One might as well expect to get blood from a turnip,” muttered Dacre in the choice vernacular of the groom’s boy. “Oh Lord! that brutal bell, lessons again! But you like ’em,” he said raising himself slowly and turning on her vindictively.

“There’s nothing else to like; pick up your book and come. I hate to look at Gregg’s eyes when we are late, I think he had cats for his ancestors, and not very long ago either, when he talks quick he always spits. Oh, that vile bell, we may as well run, he can’t see us from the school-room window or I

wouldn't give him that much satisfaction."

"When will you begin the help," panted Dacre, as they pulled up at the nearest point out of sight of the school-room.

"I'll think to-night and tell you—Ugh! Dacre, wipe your face you get so perspirationy after the shortest run; I never do."

"No thanks to you, when one can see through you for thinness."

The next evening when lessons were put away, and the school-room tea over, Gwen, instead of absorbing herself in a book until bedtime, as she generally did, took a restless fit. She moved about in a noiseless sweeping way she had; she threw the window open breathlessly, and

craned her head far into the breezy night.

A sudden gust that was carrying on a wild dance with some maple leaves, caught sight of her hair and seized on it as a new plaything, or perhaps mistook it for some of the orange-gold leaves, and swept great lengths of it out among them till her white face seemed caught in a whirling net of brilliant gold. When she drew back at last panting, she shut the window and went over to Dacre.

"You're pretty tidy," she said, "for you, but you might just take that black smudge off your nose. Do I look right?"

"You look as mad as a hatter, but you generally do that, only I think your hair makes you look madder than ever."

She caught her hair bodily, gave it a violent shake, then took out her handkerchief and rubbed her cheeks until they glowed scarlet.

“What are you at, making yourself like a turkey-cock?” demanded Dacre.

“We’ll both go into the library,” said she in a sort of studied calm, “I heard them go in after dinner and they think I’m sick and don’t eat enough if I’m white. Come on quick, now, while I’m red.”

Dacre came near and looked into her face with some curiosity.

“You’re madder to-night than I ever saw you,” he observed. “You can go, you will if you want to, of course,—I’ll not, not if I knows it.”

“If you don’t I’ll do all I possibly can to keep you at home.”

That and her look were decisive. He followed her with an angry snort, and they went swiftly down the low, broad oak stairs with their winding curved balustrade, down through the softly-carpeted corridors. When they reached the library door they stood with one accord, stock-still.

"You're whiter than ever," said he.

"Wipe your nose, you've rubbed the black all over it instead of off it. Am I red now?"

"You're magenta."

"Come on then."

When the door opened slowly and showed both their children standing in the soft glow of the lamps, Mr. and Mrs. Waring started up in some dismay.

"Is anything wrong, my dears? Are

you ill?" cried Mr. Waring, while his wife came forward nervously and peered anxiously from head to foot of the two.

By this time even Gwen's courage had waned and the old feeling of having come to judgment was fast gaining on her. Dacre was already a flaccid lump.

"You appear well, dears," said Mrs. Waring relieved, raising herself from her inspection, "and Gwen's colour seems to me to be healthier than usual."

Gwen felt smothered and speechless but she made a vehement effort and got out in an appealing hushed kind of way,

"We are quite well, mother, but we came to see you, we thought you might have time to talk to us and let us stay

a little, we have been good at our lessons so long."

The child lifted her eyes as she spoke, and turned them hungrily from father to mother in a way that sensibly embarrassed them.

Mr. Waring took his finger from between the pages of a book, came forward, and looked searchingly into his child's face and then at his wife, who seemed too astonished to take any active part in the proceedings.

"Will you not sit down?" he said politely, pulling a couple of chairs towards the pair, "pray sit down.—You have no objection, dearest, have you?"

"No, oh no, I am very pleased indeed, and it is also very pleasant to hear you are advancing in your stu-

dies," said Mrs. Waring rather supinely. There seemed so very little one could say to one's children. Mrs. Waring passed her small hand across her brow, and tried to look unpreoccupied, but it was hard not to show feeling when a valuable train of thought was broken, and hours of good work rendered null and void by this unfortunate intrusion.

Her husband felt keenly for the gentle little woman, and naturally a slight feeling of irritation smote him as he turned his gaze on his inconvenient offspring who bore it in stolid silence.

Dacre cast one rapid murderous look on his sister then he sullenly accommodated himself to his surroundings and sat on like a log.

As for Gwen, her tears were so near the

surface that she had to swallow them with a gulp, her eyes grew dull and lifeless, the brilliant colour had all faded, and her cheeks had a ghastly, streaky, livid look, from the scrubbing.

“Would you like something to eat, my dears?” said Mrs. Waring eagerly. She would not sit down but hovered above her children, she could not fathom Gwen’s horrid look of temper, and by this time the streaky cheeks had quite a revolting look. Her mother started at sight of it, and whispered in quite an audible voice,

“Her skin seems unclean and mottled. Dearest, I will speak to Mary, a Gregory’s powder I should recommend.”

Gwen’s flush deepened the streaks to lines of blood, and she could hardly keep

from shrieking out her wrath and indignation, but she controlled herself and said in a harsh level voice,

“We would like nothing to eat, thank you, we’ve had our tea, we came to see you, you don’t want us. Dacre, I think we might go.”

Then to the absolute staggering of the boy, she turned, caught his hand, and dragging him along by it went up and stood before her parents, her eyes gleaming strangely.

“Good-night, mother, good-night, father—oh, good-night!”

“Good-night, my dears,” said Mr. Waring blandly, and seeing that they still waited he stooped down stiffly and kissed the foreheads of both of them, then, with the air of a man who has done his duty, he remarked,

“Dacre’s health seems to be more robust than his sister’s, I think you are wise in recommending something of an anti-febrile nature.”

The children were half out of the room by this time, and Mrs. Waring’s eyes followed them with a puzzled stare. Something had evidently been forgotten.

“Ah, of course,” she cried, her face lighting, and running forward she put a soft detaining hand on a shoulder of each of her children and laid a small kiss on the middle of Gwen’s cheek. Then she stooped to Dacre and did the same by him.

She wondered a little as she went up to Mary’s room why Gwen shuddered when she touched her.

“I wonder if she’s feverish,” she

thought.—“Oh, what agonies of responsibility parents have to endure,” she sighed, with yearning self-pity, as soon as she reached the head of the stairs.

When the children got to the nursery, Dacre faced his sister with glaring eyes.

“Beast!” was his sole observation.

“Let me alone, oh, let me alone!” she cried, “and, Dacre, open the windows, I feel smothered.”

“You should live on the top of a wind-mill,” he grumbled, but he did as she bade him, and watched her with some puzzled concern.

She soon recovered from her smothering and drew in her head and leant against the window in silence for a few minutes, then she said with calm decision,

"Oh yes, you can go to school, there is neither reason nor justice in your staying here. They might have prevented it to-night if they'd liked."

"How?"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand."

"Well, of all the beasts! Girls' secrets are such fools of things, too! Don't look like that, it's awful with your scratchy face."

"Oh, go to bed, do!"

"I wish you would, I think you are going to be sick, I'll call Mary."

"Dacre, don't dare to, I'm as well as anything. I wish I was a witch and could fly over those trees on a broomstick."

She peered eagerly out of the window, out over the tree tops and the whirling leaves, up into the dark heavens.

"You look witchy enough now with your awful yellow hair that looks as if it were alive with fire-flies."

"Dacre, go to bed, do, I want to think of the plan."

"Oh, if you want that, I'll clear, I'd have gone before only I thought you were going to be sick."

Gwen turned a half-mocking half-wistful look upon him.

"You're a good old thing and it isn't your fault if you are an ass, only I wish you weren't," she said to herself when he had gone, "it wouldn't all be so beastly then."

She went off slowly to her little blue-and-white bedroom and let Mary put her to bed in a cold silence which she positively refused to break.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ins and outs and general details of Gwen's plan of campaign would in no wise interest, much less edify the moral reader. It is enough that the plan was a brilliant success, and its organization and execution would have done credit to the Prince of Darkness himself. Her tactics were by no means volcanic, they were resolute, gradual, and in a way scriptural, line upon line, precept upon precept, first

the seed, then the blade, then the full corn in the ear. When the initial steps were passed, just leaving the air well charged with vague apprehension and the minds of men ripe for some new development, active measures set in, in a careless unconscious sort of way, as if the divine order of things had just received a passing jar, no more, but then this jar continued and increased and grew in dimensions till the very bones of the jarred shook in their skins, and it was as much as their souls could do to hold themselves in their bodies.

Three months after the plan's inception, the amazing goings-on of Dacre, the wild originality of his pranks, the consistent sustained *diablerie* of his outbursts, the terrible all-pervadingness of his personality,

had succeeded in completely upheaving the souls of his parents and filling the entire household with a fearful sense of insecurity, as of a community conscious of the presence amongst them of an invisible infernal machine, that moves by some hidden power all over everywhere and can neither be caught nor compassed.

Mr. and Mrs. Fellowes, who kept a close eye on the affairs of the Hall children, had felt now for some time that there was too much subtlety in this departure of Dacre's to be all his own.

"The days of devil-possession are gone; I could swear it's Gwen," said Mrs. Fellowes one day, smiting her small hands together and dropping a child's petticoat on which she was sewing a button.

"I've been thinking so for some time," said her husband, "all the same, I hardly see where the 'swear' mends matters."

"Oh, never mind! When a woman's perturbed, she often relapses into original sin, it's a full year since I 'reckoned'—'swear' at least is cosmopolitan. I'll go up this minute and get to the truth of this, Gwen hasn't been near me for a fortnight, and I've been so busy, you see, I couldn't go near them."

"I shall go too, I must get a subscription for those miserable Gows from Waring, but, little woman, hadn't you better lie down? After five nights up with Jim Brown, even you must want rest!"

"Lie down! No, no; with this on my mind, why, I couldn't rest a minute."

After a rather ineffectual attempt to bring Mrs. Waring to a decent flesh-and-blood consistency, Mrs. Fellowes retreated to the school-room.

"She grows worse and worse," she muttered, as she let out some of her feelings in a sharp rap on the door.

Mr. Gedge, the present instructor, was not her husband's choice, he was launched on the children by a well-meaning uncle of Mrs. Waring's, who from time to time swooped down on the family in a protective, if rather hawk-like fashion, and invariably set some reform afloat among man or beast.

In this last visit he had let Gedge loose in the school-room. The man was as little fitted to deal with the plan's ramifications as a babe unborn.

When Mrs. Fellowes went in she got

a howl of welcome from Dacre, Gwen gave her only a quiet handshake, but the warm light that flashed into her cold eyes told more than any howl. Mr. Gedge stood up wearily and looked pleased.

"Do sit down," said he casting a furtive, fearful glance on Dacre.

He was in constant horrid dread of a new sensation, they were so diverse, so swift in succession, one never knew when one might not come on, and it might be embarrassing if set going in the presence of a lady.

Dacre, however, his familiar being otherwise engaged, was quiescent, and Gedge breathed freer.

"May I have Gwen for the afternoon?" asked Mrs. Fellowes.

She was amazed to see the hesitation

on Gwen's face and the actual look of dismay on Dacre's, but she speedily fathomed the reason.

"I knew it," she said to herself, "Gwen is the mover in the whole business." Then aloud, "Gwen, you will come, dear, Mr. Gedge's eyes have said 'yes' already."

Mr. Gedge had a lively though bashful admiration for the little American, he beamed his assent in quite a sprightly way. "It will be one less to cope with," he reflected, "and I can perhaps get my poor Amy's letter finished."

The devil, in a specially evil moment, had revealed to Mr. Gedge's pupils the existence of this sweet young woman, and had thereby added another hundredweight to the millstone already encircling the neck of her affianced.

Mrs. Fellowes looked with sudden sympathy at the young man, then with twinkling eyes at his charges, he seemed so ludicrously out of proportion to his task.

“Poor thing!” She thought it with such amused vehemence it almost got spoken aloud. “Poor thing, you shall have a peaceful afternoon for once!”

“Mr. Gedge, do give me Dacre too, do, just for one day! He shall go for a ride with Mr. Fellowes.”

“Oh golly!” muttered Dacre, dancing in his glee.

Gwen’s face grew brilliant with joy, she could now go with an easy conscience, she couldn’t by any possibility have left Dacre alone, he was too utterly “an ass”. She could now have a whole long afternoon

to be happy in; she needn't think once all the time, only just laugh and play and let herself be kissed—she never by any chance ventured a kiss on her own account—and she would feel Mrs. Fellowes' soft hands on her head—she always brushed her hair for tea—and hear her soft voice, and it would stay in her ears making little tunes; and the Rector, he would be good too, and remain in the drawing-room after tea—he always did when they came—he was always kind and he told such funny stories.

Gwen's contained joy broke out in a prolonged "Oh!"

Mrs. Fellowes looked rapidly round the handsome room and out into the Park, the finest in the county, and back to the child's face.

"It is abominable, abominable," she thought angrily, "just to be away from the place for a few hours transforms the child, she is simply beautiful this minute with that look—oh, it is brutal! Gwen, love, run at once and put on your things, and, Dacre, run down in the porch, I'll tell Mr. Fellowes you are going with him."

As soon as the children were gone she said kindly,

"Mr. Gedge, you'll have a respite anyway."

"Mrs. Fellowes," he burst out, "I am coming to see the Rector, I have endeavoured, and I truly hope conscientiously, to do my duty, but I find my present position altogether untenable. I am not a very strong man, Mrs. Fellowes, and I

find this life is fast undermining my constitution."

He paused for a moment; then he went on hurriedly, in a sudden impulse of confidence,

"Mrs. Fellowes, forgive my troubling you with my affairs but you are so very kind,—“I have hopes, very dear hopes, and from various strange sensations in the region of my heart when my struggles with Dacre have been specially trying and prolonged. I have reason to fear some fundamental lesion of the organ."

Mr. Gedge had just been reading up the heart in some medical journal, he had also lately ascertained that his maternal aunt had died of *Angina-pectoris*, so he was naturally upset in his mind.

“If one has hopes, Mrs. Fellowes,” he went on sadly, “one’s duty seems to be to guard against anything that must interfere with such hopes, always supposing them to be lawful and right.”

“Indeed, I quite agree with you,” said Mrs. Fellowes with much heartiness, and with an unholy tendency to laughter, “I agree with you, and no doubt, as is the way of such things, your hopes are bound up in the hopes and happiness of another. For her sake alone you must consider your position seriously.”

“Yes, I will turn my thoughts to some other sphere of action, but before I leave here,” he added with solemn resolve, “I deem it my duty to my employers to represent to them the urgent advisability

of sending my elder pupil to a public school—I know you agree with me in this, Mrs. Fellowes?”

“Agree with you! why, we have been fighting for it for years.”

“Then I may rely on your and your husband’s help in this matter?” he asked, looking rather askew admiration at her through his eyeglasses.

He had received a slight injury to one eye in his youth, and according to Dacre it was now “a game one”.

By these suggestions of Mr. Gedge it will be seen that Gwen’s leaven was working.

CHAPTER IX.

THE decree had gone forth, and Dacre was to go to Eton. Ancestral taint and sisterly guile had won the day, though not without a tough struggle. The idea of home culture, vague and ill-defined as it was, died hard, and Mr. and Mrs. Waring still bemoaned their fate daily in the intervals of work.

They were now much disturbed in their minds concerning the plan of religion

which they had conceived in the tender youth of their offspring, and which had been worked up to with rather more consistency than usually characterized those plans of theirs that dealt with outside and minor matters.

That it should have occurred to Henry and Grace Waring was the most remarkable part of this plan. They both looked upon religion as they did upon art, as a thing apart and on a somewhat low level, to be considered in leisure hours. In some phases of mind they might indeed almost have been said to glory in it, and to rejoice that the ages should own such a heritage, just as one might rejoice in the work of a great master.

They were, of course, both too appreciative of good literature to have neglected the

Bible, they knew every twist and turn in it as they did of the Koran and the Brahminic Vedas.

As for doubts and things of that sort, they never, so to speak, went in for them, their minds were not of that order. In the same way the truths or the untruths of Christianity seemed to them an interesting enough study between working hours. In Mrs. Waring's case, perhaps, they appealed fitfully to some part of herself she never quite understood, that same sentimental part that often suffered a keen stab,—for instance in the case of the Rectory babies, and sometimes from a strange look in Gwen's face. But she had almost ceased to speculate upon these odd sensations, and was inclined to put them down to a strain of puritan blood

that had somehow trickled into the more vigorous fluid of her fighting forbears, which perhaps might almost account for her preference for Christianity over other creeds.

It will be seen then that the reception or rejection of Christianity by their children, was a matter of no vital importance to these parents. They were, however, intensely interested in the result itself, that was quite another thing; the phases of mind the function must unfold seemed certainly a subject worth research, and filled them with the keenest interest.

"You are quite sure, dearest," said Mr. Waring, a few days before Dacre's departure was to take place, "that Mary has not tampered with the minds of our children."

"I am certain, quite certain. She has certainly seemed to resent my orders in this matter, but she has not disobeyed them."

Mrs. Waring sat down and tried to take up the thread of her thoughts, but it was broken again in a minute by Mr. Waring pushing back his chair suddenly and looking at her in a disturbed restless way. She went over, laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked anxiously into his face.

"Are you troubled, love, can I not help you?"

"I should be glad, my Grace, if I felt more convinced that the minds of our children are really a blank as far as any knowledge of religion goes."

"I am sure Mr. and Mrs. Fellowes——"

“Dearest, the idea is revolting! Fellowes, a gentleman! And his wife! She is your friend, that is sufficient.” He bowed as his grandfather, the courtliest man in a courtly court might have done. “But I fear that when very young the children may have received foreign impressions, the class that people the stable-yard are often quite versed in what they term ‘the truths of the Gospel’.”

“But so long ago?”

“Not so very long after all, and impressions are most tenacious things, more especially erroneous ones. Does the fact not hamper us daily, dearest? Even this moment,” he went on musingly, “after all these years, I can recollect praying at my mother’s knee with a quite astonishing fervour, which now seems next to reasonless, and yet I doubt

if the impression of that fervour will ever leave me."

"We can only hope, dearest," she said.

Her husband's fear depressed her, she was feeling just then, and rather to her cost, how very remarkably clinging old impressions were. They were hovering round her at that very moment and entwining her in a maze of the old dead visions of dead days, when she was a child herself and wore long lawn night-gowns with frilled sashes, and said prayers. She went over to the fire to make it up and ended by putting it out.

"Oh, Henry," she said at last, from the hearthrug, shivering a little, "what if, after all, we might just as well have allowed our children to run along the common groove like those very fat children

of Mrs. Manners',—they seem wholesome and not devoid of intelligence. And then they are handsome and well grown, yet the boy is ten and not even in Latin; Mrs. Manners considers that in ten years the fact will make no difference in his career. On the contrary, look at Dacre, think of the load of anxiety and thought we have expended upon him and yet——" She broke off sadly.

Her husband regarded her for a minute with sympathizing eyes.

"Dearest," he said at last softly, "you are apt to forget the fact that our poor Dacre is—I hate to hurt you, dear, but you know it—he is most unfortunately a throwing-back, and must follow the fate of his kind. He must enter the army,—it is deplorable, but so it must be."

"The army!" murmured the small woman wringing her hands softly, "it is sad, it is hard on us. I do think, dearest, we might have been more successful in our children."

"Our child," interrupted her husband.

Her eyes clouded and she repeated hesitatingly, "Yes, our child—Gwen's abilities are considerable."

"Yes," said her father with unmixed satisfaction, "my hopes rest on Gwen, her abilities are indeed most gratifying."

For one fleeting moment, which she blotted from her memory with shame, her mother almost wished they weren't; she might then be easier to get some knowledge of, and not be quite so alarming.

CHAPTER X.

THE function was arranged for a certain Wednesday in February, the day before Dacre was to leave for school, and the children had been given formal notice to appear in the drawing-room at three o'clock. They were now waiting in the school-room speculating on the event. They knew it must be something very unusual from the fact of the drawing-room, of all places in the world, being appointed as the scene of action.

It was at the end of a dismal six weeks of holidays, mostly spent, by reason of colds, between the nursery and the school-room. Indeed, it had been the very flattest bout of holidays the two had ever yet endured.

Dacre's object being attained, there was no further use for organized "cussedness" so he had relapsed into his ordinary state of gusty wickedness, which being natural was nothing very especial in the way of a pastime, and quite unlike the six months' excitement of his raid on society. There was nothing to supply the place of this now, nothing—neither cricket, football, nor even riding—so small wonder that life was pretty much of a blank to the boy.

It was even worse for Gwen, the mover

and the mainspring of the enterprise. When she found herself landed victoriously on the threshold of her goal, with her conscious triumph there got mixed other sensations of a most unpleasant nature. The horrible feeling of flat inaction after the whirl of action, that plays havoc with all great conquerors, seized on her, and did the same by this little one, and then she had none of the fêtes and the follies that follow hot on the heels of other conquerors for their consolation. She felt the most miserable victor breathing, her soul was brimming with bitterness, and the overflow vented itself largely on Dacre's luckless pate.

The children having nothing to go upon could arrive at no very satisfactory solution to their mysterious summons. Mary's look

as she smoothed Gwen's hair, put Dacre's collar straight, and kept on fussing round when she had no more to do, made things look more mysterious still, then she sighed like a steam-engine the whole time, which added a presage-of-ill character to the mystery that irritated Gwen horribly.

"For goodness sake, Mary, do go!" she cried at last in despair, "go! You are like the old turkey when her ducklings ran out into the lake the other day."

Mary straightened her glasses and looked at the child. "'Tis brains is the matter with you, my dear," she said; "however could you guess at the very thoughts as were running in my head? I was thinking of the creature flapping there helpless and I was lik'ning myself to her that very minute. Master

Dacre would never have guessed it, bless him ! ”

Gwen felt she had scored a point and continued,

“ What is going to happen to us, Mary ? ”

Mary regarded her in silence.

“ If you know you might tell us,” said the girl impatiently, “ or,” she added scornfully, “ are you still more like the turkey, and are only frightened because you know so little ?—you look like that.”

“ Oh Lord ! ” muttered the woman under her breath, feeling very hard hit, but she replied with dignity, “ My dear, it certainly ain’t my place to tell you what your parents have thought fit not to acquaint you with.”

“ They see fit to acquaint us with nothing as far as I can see. Well, as

you can't tell us or don't know anything to tell us, do go away, please. You move about so and look so queer, you make one think that a horrible new thing is coming on us, so do go, please. I'm not cross or nasty, only I feel queer myself and frightened, I could scream and yell and howl this minute—oh, I wish Mrs. Fellowes was here."

"She is coming, my dear," said Mary, looking anxiously at the girl.

"Oh, she often looks like that," said Dacre consolingly, "I believe she is mad—she is dying to squeal and screech and yet she is as quiet as an old rat, I believe myself one good roar would do her good."

Mary was a sensible body and knew when a thing was beyond her powers, she

said nothing but went down and intercepted Mrs. Fellowes on her way to the drawing-room and carried her off.

"Is Gwen well, Mary?" she asked, as they went upstairs.

"Eats and sleeps well, ma'am, but she has an over-active brain, ma'am, I should say, and if 'tis, 'tis only God can help her," whispered Mary solemnly.

Gwen had recovered by this time and she and Dacre were engaged in a wrangle, stormy on Dacre's side, sarcastic and calm on Gwen's. At sight of Mrs. Fellowes they left off.

"Oh you dear, you dear!" cried Gwen sweeping up to her, and taking her kiss with a sort of gasp, "we feel awful, as if some new horror was coming on."

"You'll stand by us, Mrs. Fellowes? Do

you think they might repent of Eton? Gwen gets mad when I say that, but, you know, no fellow knows what they'll do next," he added plaintively.

"Dacre, I wonder if you know how horribly impertinent you are? If you belonged to me and spoke of me like that, I'd cut you for a week!"

"Oh, but you're quite different, of course no one would speak of you like that—Oh, come in!"

A new footman, a tall awkward creature, who found his brains softening in this astonishing family, had been giving a succession of small knocks for the last five minutes, at last he supplemented them by a choking cough.

"There is that giraffe," said Gwen impatiently, "I suppose we are wanted!"

Mrs. Fellowes, look at him," she whispered, "everybody who comes to this house looks like that in a week, and as for Mary, she is awful, going about in a muttering way and glaring at me as if I was a penny show. The tutors are the same, even that great leggy gawk—oh dear, what's the matter with us all?

"And another thing—oh, wait just a moment, they'll never know if we're one minute late or twenty, they don't want us a bit, oh no, they never do, I tell you, they are quite happy and oh, so busy, so appallingly busy—I want to tell you another horrible habit the people here have. I must tell you all this," she added seeing Dacre's rather astonished face, "it has all just come up to the surface of me. The people in this

place always whisper in the most diabolical way, there is never a single sound in these corridors, never, and that's why I often nearly—burst to howl and screech. Dacre is an idiot as everyone knows, and he says I'm mad."

"Hush, child!"

"Oh well, come on then, but there's not an atom of hurry, they don't want us."

"Mrs. Fellowes isn't such an ass as not to know that," said Dacre scornfully, "but I want to know what's on in there, so does she, so come on."

"It's nothing nice, you may be quite sure, it's probably got something to do with lessons. Perhaps they want to examine you before you go to school," she added with a fiendish laugh.

Her mouth was terrible in its hardness.

Mrs. Fellowes stooped down quickly and kissed her on it.

“Gwen, love, you don’t know, something very nice may be going to happen to you, the very nicest thing that has ever yet happened.”

Gwen looked up at her astonished, some tone in her soft voice touched her.

“I wonder—” she said slowly, “I wish——”

“What dear?”

“Oh, I don’t think I know,” said she, with a short laugh. “Come on! Gru! Look at the table covered with books and things! I knew it was an exam! Look, Dacre!”

When her greetings to her host and hostess were over, Mrs. Fellowes went over to her husband, who was standing by the table of books.

"One of the evidences of Christianity to be placed before the infant mind," he said softly, pointing to *Lord Amberley*. "Another!" and he put his finger on Renan's *Life of Jesus*.

"Good gracious! you'll stop that?"

"If I can—what's wrong with Gwen?"

"I don't know, I put my foot in it just now by pressing for an explanation."

Dacre, meanwhile, was feeling less than a worm under the concentrated gaze of his parents. After the first remarks concerning health addressed to both children, with a casual allusion to his projected departure for school for Dacre's benefit, and an earnest request from his mother to consider his teeth and his stomach and to eschew sweet-stuff, "the great temptation of public schools," she observed sadly,

and when some supine observations with regard to things in general had been turned on Gwen, Mr. and Mrs. Waring looked appealingly at each other and subsided into a silent and curious inspection of their son.

The dumb endurance of the boy showed a good deal of pluck; he merely wriggled spasmodically from time to time. But he had come to the extremest end of his tether and was on the point of some outbreak, when deliverance reached him in a low swift sigh from his mother, and a queer sudden movement on his father's part, who pushed back his chair, loosed his wife's hand with a deprecating "Pray, my love!" and began to speak in a general inoffensive way, fixing his gaze on no one in particular, to Dacre's infinite relief.

“There are subjects that are usually comprised in the education of young children,” said he, “which we, after deep and anxious thought, have seen fit to omit from the curriculum of our son and daughter. We have taken special pains to impress upon their various instructors, as also upon the persons appointed to their personal service, that a certain part of their minds should be kept free, entirely clear and free from certain impressions, that they should remain, so to speak, a blank as far as regards this form of knowledge. The form of knowledge I allude to—” he continued, his eye falling once more on the luckless Dacre who was drinking in his words with open-eyed wonder, and, finding the boy useful as a target, he fixed him inexorably until the end of the

discourse. "The form of knowledge I allude to is that known as the knowledge of religion. It is sometimes called a sense, and has in a manner become so by heredity, but I doubt much whether it was innate in the race in the beginning. This point of view has of course powerful advocates, as we all know, at least—" he added coughing nervously, "as Mr. Fellowes and his wife know. However, this question though most interesting is not necessary to my explanation."

Here his eye which had swerved for a moment, again caught Dacre's. "The reasons why we have insisted upon the denial of this knowledge to our children are many. Firstly, my wife and I consider that it is hardly fair to any human creature, with normal brain power in

its young receptive condition, to give this brain power a distinct bias with regard to the fundamental points of any science. I speak of it not in the common but in the original application of the word, which is merely empiric and can certainly not be looked upon as proven in any part, —however great its ethical value as a factor of culture may be,” he added with an apologetic glance at the rector. “For the same reason we have withheld geology and the advanced parts of several of the natural sciences, wherein is evolved the doctrine of evolution. But of these later.

“We have been more stringent in our regulations with regard to religion and its most advanced and refined development—that known as Christianity—because it enters

so largely into all current questions, and entrenches, or at least the arguments of its exponents do, on so many of our more exact sciences. Another reason for withholding this knowledge was the strange methods so many of its disciples have of apprehending and applying it—even of considering its literature. The process of exclusion by which we have striven to our goal has, I fear, seemed to our dear friends here to-day an unwise one, but we have taken deep thought concerning this matter and have taken no step lightly. We have awaited a state of consciousness in our children capable of receiving and judging the evidences of religion—more especially of that form of it known as Christianity—in an unprejudiced and reasonable manner, without bias, and with no

early half-true half-false impressions to confuse and mislead.

“Mr. Fellowes,” he concluded with solemnity, “we have done, as we consider, our duty, and in the best way we know of. Heredity and other inner influences will no doubt in some measure nullify our efforts, as will also the possible impressions—no doubt of a low order—which our children, in that period of mere physical development before the culture of their higher parts began, may have received from outside; but with these exceptions, I feel confident that, as regards all knowledge of religion, the minds of our children are a blank.”

He was silent for a moment and regarded the blanks with supreme satisfaction.

“Mr. Fellowes,” he began again, “my wife and I are most anxious that our

children should receive all the facts and arguments in favour of Christianity before the counter arguments are put before them, and in the most reasonable and enlightened manner. We have therefore invited you to be present to-day and would feel ourselves under still one more obligation to you—" here he looked from Mr. Fellowes to his wife and so made one of them, "you who are so eminently fitted for the task—if you would make our children acquainted with the leading points in the history of religion. Would you also be so good as to direct them in their course of reading—our daughter at least, for Dacre, I believe, goes to Eton to-morrow? My wife and I have, as you know, been reluctantly obliged to relinquish our plans in this instance, owing to the pressure of strong

ancestral bias which will, I fear, also compel us to allow the boy to devote himself to brutal pursuits, and finally to enter the army. His ordinary culture then in religious matters must be entrusted to the tutors of his school, who, no doubt, will fill his mind with strange vagaries. However," he went on with a fixed melancholy look at the boy, "Dacre's intellect is not of a high order, it matters little; but with Gwen very specially we desire your aid. We have discovered in her an unusual power of applying knowledge, and we would be glad if you would examine her from time to time, that she may have a sound and reasonable knowledge of the arguments on the one side of this very interesting question, before she considers those on the other; we may be accused," he continued

with a sigh, "and perhaps justly, of an unfair attempt to bias the girl's mind by not arranging that the study of the opposed facts and arguments should run side by side with these. But in this matter, I fancy," he said, with a little smile at his wife, "I fancy both my wife's and my hereditary tendencies have rather handicapped our intelligence, I do trust with no ill-results to our children," he added, embracing them both in one perturbed glance and sitting down rather wearily.

CHAPTER XI.

DURING the latter part of this discourse Mr. Fellowes had been sorting the books on the small table, and had them now arranged in two separate heaps.

Gwen had been gradually edging her chair near Mrs. Fellowes and her face was alight and eager.

Any new thing is always full of possibilities to a young creature moving out in all directions after experience. Besides,

there was an undercurrent of quiet anxious affection running all through her father's half-incomprehensible speech, that struck her and kept down for the moment her usual defiant attitude of mind when had up before her parents.

Dacre's reflections, whenever the paternal eye was off him, partook of the most primitive simplicity.

"Thank goodness, I'm out of it. After all, it's a good thing to be an ass; and the army, oh golly! I never expected anything so sensible as that from 'em."

With that he winked lugubriously in Gwen's direction and was rather upset by catching Mr. Fellowes' eye instead.

"I am quite certain that whatever you and Mrs. Waring have done in this matter has been done most conscientiously," said

Mr. Fellowes discreetly. "I am glad you think me capable of teaching your children, what to my way of thinking is the head and front of all knowledge—the knowledge of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ—"

Gwen looked at Mr. Fellowes with an astonished eager gaze.

"This all sounds quite good," she reflected, "but then, is it? Things are so very different from sounds,—every tutor before he comes, sounds lovely."

"But, Mr. Waring," continued the rector mildly, "if you entrust this matter to me you must also entrust me with the choosing of the books bearing on the subject; for instance, I should decidedly reserve this book, *Lord Amberley*, also this, Renan's *Life of Jesus*, for that future period when you intend to give your children the

evidences against Christianity. These, to my mode of thinking, would certainly be valueless for our purpose."

"Indeed, Mr. Fellowes, you surprise me!"

He went over and glanced in rather a hurt way at the books, "I consider that work of Lord Amberley's a most unimpassioned, useful, and an eminently trustworthy history of religions. Lord Amberley seems quite of our way of thinking—my wife's and mine—for though he theorizes so little, confining himself chiefly to the recording of facts, yet in the whole tone of the work, one notices his predilection for that religion instituted by Christ over other faiths. I must say I should have considered *that* book a valuable one in your cult; however, you are a

specialist," he remarked magnanimously, "we but dabblers in these matters, therefore we are bound to yield our judgment.

"As for Renan's *Life*, it appears to me to be a charming composition, simple, and in style delightful. I should have thought it would have appealed pleasantly to the childish comprehension; however, as you object, with, no doubt, full and sufficient ground for your objections, we will leave the matter entirely in your hands and in those of your dear wife," he added with a stiff bow in her direction, "a most excellent helpmeet in this as in all other things."

"Oh, Mr. Waring, please don't imagine that I meddle in all my husband's business!" cried Mrs. Fellowes, half-amused and half-angry; it was too abominable to be made

a sort of co, or under-curate to her husband, even by this pair of curiosities. "I should never dream of interfering in the religious instruction of anyone, either young or old; and if I had any mind to, I assure you my husband would soon strangle that tendency in me."

"Oh dear me!" murmured Mr. Waring, "we always act so much together that I never thought of interference in such a connection; pray excuse me, dear Mrs. Fellowes," he entreated nervously.

Mrs. Fellowes could have slain him and herself. She kept her eyes carefully turned from her husband but she felt his silent malicious laughter to the very tips of her fingers.

"Mr. Waring, there is nothing whatever to excuse, it is only a little silly clerical

point of etiquette. You have no idea how the clerical mind runs to trifles, I am only beginning to get any correct notions and I have been studying it now over eight years: It is much more interesting than geology," she continued, turning to Mrs. Waring and awakening her out of her reverie, "and requires quite as much hammering to get anything worth having out of it. John quite agrees with me."

"Ah, Mrs. Fellowes, it is so easy for you to see fun in things," said Mrs. Waring in a pretty wistful way; "it is quite a gift, I fear it has not been bestowed upon me."

"Good gracious, I should think it hadn't!" said Mrs. Fellowes to herself, "if you had a spark of it you'd keep him in his right mind as well as yourself."

"Don't you think Dacre looks rather idiotic?" whispered Gwen suddenly.

He certainly did, with his mouth ajar and the bright red tip of his tongue visible through his teeth.

"They always have that effect upon him," continued Gwen, "a frequent course of it would very soon land him in an idiot asylum."

"Hush, dear!"

Mr. Waring seemed now ill at ease and not at all satisfied at the way things were shaping. The affair was missing fire both for him and for his wife; they wanted, so to speak, a thorough microscopic examination of their children; they wanted them then and there put out on the table and carefully gone over as a preliminary proceeding, even if as yet no final and systematic

classification of their contents could be attempted.

Where was the result of research to come in if the one was to be shipped off to school the very next day, and the other to be turned over to Mr. Fellowes? Mrs. Waring's mind also ran in this groove.

"Will there not be an examination now at once?" she asked in pained surprise. "I quite understood this was our arrangement."

"I too, dear love; we must discuss the matter. Mr. Fellowes,—ahem, my wife and I thought it might be as well to examine the state of our children's minds now at once; it seems important to ascertain clearly how far our plans have been successful, and in this we might be of some help to you."

Mr. Fellowes looked gravely annoyed. Dacre started violently and nearly took the tip off his tongue, and Gwen's face fell; she straightened herself and a transfiguration fell upon her, her mouth hardened, her colour faded to a dull gray, and her eyes took on the masked look that Mrs. Fellowes so detested to see.

"Always the same!" she muttered, "always the same! I was beginning to think that with Dacre going to school and everything we might be let off and have tea instead. Look, there it is getting stone cold, they've clean forgotten it! I never can answer a word when they question me, it's beastly unfair to force one into looking like a fool when one isn't. Dacre, of course, might be a cabbage this minute—look at him! They treat one's

brains like puppets to dance when they whistle ! ”

“ Gwen, dear Gwen, you let your tongue go mad ! ”

Gwen winced, she prided herself a good deal on her strength and reticence.

“ As for the examination, it is quite natural your father and mother should arrive at some idea of your state of mind, and as they start on the premise that you know nothing they won't expect you to shine.”

“ You don't know,” said the girl surlily. “ one can't argue from experience with regard to them ever, they are as reasonless and as unjust in their expectations as they are in everything.”

“ Gwen, I am ashamed of you, you are unjust and no one else, and rather rude

seeing that any questions you have to answer will be asked by Mr. Fellowes. Now listen, either your father or my husband is going to speak."

"Your father and mother," said Mr. Fellowes coming over and standing so that he could watch both of the children, "have asked me to put a few simple questions to you."

The countenances of Mr. and Mrs. Waring fell visibly, this informal, good-humoured, casual way of carrying on, was not the sort of thing they had expected.

"One should make a speciality of every form of knowledge, however trivial," said Mr. Waring in a low voice, "we should have put ourselves in a position to be competent personally to conduct this affair."

His wife looked comprehension, and clasped his hand a trifle harder.

No one but themselves and possibly their Creator had any idea of the amount this unfortunate couple had to endure.

"If I ask you anything," went on the rector, "and you can't answer it, you mustn't mind, for as you just now heard from your father you are not expected to know anything definitely."

Gwen looked up with a quick sarcastic question in her face.

Mr. Fellowes laughed. "You think in that case I had better hold my tongue; well, perhaps I had, but even if one gains no absolute knowledge of the question asked, from the answers to it, one sometimes finds out other things just as useful. In your classical readings you came across

many allusions to the gods of Greece and Rome, didn't you?"

"Yes," they assented. "That wasn't much of a poser," reflected Dacre glibly.

"On the whole what did you think of them?"

"They were pretty mean," said Dacre with conviction.

"They were just like other people, only stronger, and better looking, and bigger," said Gwen.

"Would you be inclined to think any one of them capable of any great or stupendous work?"

"Goodness no!" said Gwen, "they had a great deal too much to do with their little things; punishing mortals too, that took up half their time."

"Well, then, who do you imagine made

the world—have you ever thought on the subject?”

“This is most distressing,” whispered Mr. Waring, “he seems about to give all these rank hypotheses as facts—this is childish, unworthy of Gwen’s intellect!”

“Dear love, you are unfair, there is absolutely nothing proven on either side.”

“But the counter arguments will not be presented as facts.”

“The religious school has firm convictions and admits no hypotheses, I have heard. I confess this primitive mode rather interests me; I wonder what Gwen’s reply will be—hush, here it comes!”

“I never could think of any one person undertaking such a work,” said she, looking rather interested. “I have always thought

it was done by some ceaseless force, that keeps things wound up."

"Do you think this force a beneficent one or the contrary?"

"Just as the humour takes it. It seems sometimes quite human in its tempers and its injustice; rather capricious and old-womanish too,—I often think that."

"Why?"

"Why! From the stupid times and places that earthquakes and waterspouts and things come, they hardly ever burst up or beat down desert islands or places like that; they always flock to populated places where people have been working for years to make themselves comfortable, and then all in a minute their work is undone and they may think themselves lucky if they aren't undone altogether."

That sort of thing seems reasonless and like an old woman."

"Poor little foolish Gwen!" said Mrs. Fellowes, with such a funny look that Gwen had to laugh.

"When you are older," said Mr. Fellowes, "and know more, you won't be so final in your judgments. I'm going to tell you a fact now, will you believe it?"

Gwen got scarlet, the question seemed to her a reproach. "Mr. Fellowes, of course I will!"

"Then, Gwen, incredible as it sounds, a great, a glorious, and an Almighty God, a Spirit, Who has had neither beginning nor end, made this world and keeps it going, and He is neither unjust nor unreasonable, capricious nor an old woman, though," he continued to the open-eyed

wonder of two in that room, "that you should accredit Him with all of these rather despicable qualities, does not astonish me in the least. Can you take my word for this fact I have told you? If you can't, say so; I need not ask you, however, you will be honest," he added with a little amused laugh.

"It sounds rather queer and mixed up, considering things as things are," said Gwen quaintly, "but I'd take your word for anything, Mr. Fellowes."

Just then some unlucky impulse guided her eyes in her mother's direction, a little softening towards her had seized on the girl for the instant and her eyes had followed her thoughts, but they dropped like a shot, she stiffened, and loosed hold of the piece of Mrs. Fellowes' dress she

had furtively been clinging to. Her mother's eyes were fixed on her in a puzzled, uncomprehending, rather disappointed way, horribly trying to her pride.

"I'll not say another word, not if they tear me with wild horses!" she said to herself tragically. "How dare she look at me like that! Now, Dacre, upon my word, I would not blame her if she did it to him! Dacre, you look awful!" she whispered viciously, "more beastly than human! Shut your mouth!"

And not another word could Mr. Fellowes, to his infinite relief, extract from the girl.

As for the boy he was, on the face of it, hopeless; so in defiance of and despite the protesting attitude of the harassed

parents, the rector calmly put his foot down and brought this ceremony to a conclusion.

"Mr. Waring," he said, "I think you must be satisfied that at least we have fairly virgin soil to work in."

Mr. Waring mumbled a gentle, "H'm!" He was thoroughly dissatisfied with the whole business.

"Will you allow Gwen to come to our house," went on Mr. Fellowes imperturbably, "every Tuesday and, let me see, every Friday afternoon?"

Gwen flashed a glance of delight on Mrs. Fellowes and across her she flung a grin of defiance on Dacre.

"And to Dacre, if you will allow me, I will give one or two books to read when he happens to get time. Story books, Dacre, don't squirm."

Mr. and Mrs. Waring again looked with melancholy regret at each other, then extended the glance to their offspring. When it reached Mr. Fellowes a slight touch of gentle wrath had flittered into it, but it was in vain to kick against the pricks, the proceedings were at an end, and another failure had died and was buried out of their sight.

And then they all drank some cold tea, and little atoms of cake were presented to the children, with a timid request from their mother to pick the currants out of them, this bugbear of their infancy still clinging to the little woman, and the drawing-room twilight was left at last free to the pair who looked haggard, tired, and frustrated.

CHAPTER XII.

DACRE had been shot through Eton into Sandhurst, and Gwen was fast growing up and imbibing religious instruction in precisely the fashion one might have expected from her surroundings and her turn of mind.

She received the facts as facts, and get very keen and eager over those that had any dramatic interest in them. She dug into their depths and revelled in

them as any other boy or girl of sound intellectual capacity would do, when they were put as Mr. Fellowes put them. The unsatisfactory part of the business was when the horrible critical faculty of the girl began to ransack the facts and the theories hung on them, and to turn them inside out, and to compare and classify them with an honest downright unscrupulousness that no girl suckled on the Bible could ever, no matter what her opinions might be, or rather her own opinion of her opinions, find it in her heart to use, and the summing up of Gwen's searchings and comparings was monotonous and commonplace enough.

"The whole scheme is very fine," she said one day, "it is a perfect idyll in its way, and divine from the mere exaltation

and grandeur of it, but where any proof of a personal God comes in I can't see, any more than in any of the other creeds. They all seem to be chips off the same block. The ideal God seems universally human—this Jewish one with the rest. He is feeble and tyrannical and He, in the Old Testament, is so inconsistent; and in the New—well, after all, that is only rather a more modern reflection of the Old. As for Christ, we know so little of Him,—and then when all's said His loveliest and best thoughts were also thought in the Vedas by the Brahmins. It is wonderful beyond comprehension to me how so many have lived and died for such myths. The greatest and divinest quality of God seems to me to be His inexorableness, and even that failed Him more than once at a pinch."

"It is a sense wanting in me," she often told Mr. Fellowes; "the sense of religion, as in Dacre the sense of poetry, you can't supply it, no one can. I lose an infinite deal, I know, your face literally shining over these things tells me so, plainer than a thousand words. I would give anything to experience such rapture, which is itself divine, but I couldn't to save my life—it's curious!"

"Dacre tells me," she began suddenly another day, "that he quite believes in Christianity. Now, if his shallow feeble acceptance of the thing—and he says it is just like all the other fellows' beliefs,—is accepted, average Christianity must be poor stuff. I will wait until I get a better hold on it than that, before I say anything definite about believing or disbelieving.

I say merely, the scheme does not appeal to me, the fault is in myself no doubt, your judgment is sound in all other things, I quite believe it is just as sound in this."

On her seventeenth birthday, Mr. and Mrs. Fellowes gave her an edition of Browning.

"The parts she understands will be a revelation to her," Mr. Fellowes said, "and those she doesn't will serve as a brain tonic, for she will be sure to thresh them out with blood-curdling thoroughness."

They were all this and more, as Mr. Fellowes felt to his cost when a few days later she brought him *Caliban on Cetebos*.

"Now here," she said, "is my exact impression of the Christian God. I wonder

if I shall ever change it, and by what process? I must be in ⁱⁿ a horribly unfinished initial state if I can think side by side with a brutal creature like that. It's queer,—I am not altogether like him in other respects," she added with a laugh.

Mr. Fellowes answered her, as he always did, with perfect good humour and sound good sense.

It was hard, uphill, melancholy work for him, but he did it like a man, and as well as he knew how—he tried to hope, and left the rest with God.

Mrs. Fellowes did her little part as soon as the solemnities were at an end. She seized on the girl and petted and made much of her, and opened out her mother's heart to her.

"She must learn what love is, then perhaps she will stop prying about after justice and other matters. Besides, it is absolutely necessary she should before she has children of her own. She must be bathed in it, so that she actually has to absorb it like children do nourishment in their bath of veal broth. I shall keep driving it into her at every possible opportunity. It would be an awful satisfaction if just once in a while she would let one get a real good glimpse into her, to see how it works. I hate doing things in the dark!"

"But you do get a sight of the result sometimes. I remember myself having had several. I believe the girl has an immense power of affection."

"Mercy on us! As if I did not know that! When it does break out an earth-

quake is a fool to it, but then the eruptions are always so sudden and the calming down so preternaturally swift that when they happen one is far too overwhelmed to have any time or faculty left for observation, and one never dares to go back on those outbursts, as you very well know. Oh, my Gwen, my poor, poor little Gwen, God will have to help your husband very considerably!"

And so Gwen grew up and her story began.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE very air of Gwen's two rooms, the bedroom and the dressing-room off it, shimmered with excitement. It glowed in the soft light of the innumerable wax candles with which Mary had studded the tables, it hung in the rose-pink curtains, it shone in the leaping blue flame of the fire, it was everywhere and most inconveniently so in the fingers of the new lady's maid, a creature of sentiment, who

was putting the finishing touches to her young mistress's bodice, while Mary was trotting round restlessly, disturbed in every individual hair of her head, casting rapt glances at Gwen and furtive ones at the door.

At the sound of a footstep on the stairs she gave a sudden start and her face lighted, but it shaded as suddenly.

"Only Mrs. Fellowes!" she murmured, and she showed her in with some grimness.

Mrs. Fellowes stopped on the threshold and took in Gwen leisurely with a half-choked gasp of wonder, then she went over and kissed her.

"Gwen, love, you *are* beautiful, I never knew it before!"

Gwen looked up at her then turned to

the glass and laughed. "I am," she said, "I am beautiful and *I* never knew it before!"

Then she stood up and shook down the soft gleaming folds of her tulle-shrouded silk and straightened herself.

It was her first long dress, and added two inches to her height.

"Look, I am changed, I am a new creature, I am afraid of nothing! I feel like a knight-errant setting forth on his quest, his was glory, mine—" she paused.

"What's yours?" said Mrs. Fellowes smiling on her.

"Mine? Mine's glory too."

She paused again, and a sudden trouble leaped into her face.

"But it's due to me, see. Why not?" And her great eyes flashed triumphantly

into the glass. “‘*I will attain*’ like Paracelsus.”

She laughed again but her mirth had a jar in it.

“He went the wrong way about it,” remarked Mrs. Fellowes placidly, “take care you don’t do the same!”

“He was a fraud to begin with, I’m not, neither in brain nor body.”

Mrs. Fellowes looked at her critically, “the outside of you is flawless enough, and, goodness knows! you are all there as far as brain goes. But I’m not so sure as to the inside of you; there, an inch or so to the left of that diamond star, I believe you are perfectly empty!”

“Ugh! That’s empty of course, except for the bits of you and the rector it holds, there’s been nothing to fill it.”

"A thing must have a capacity for holding before it can hold, my good child, and original capacity dwindles from disuse, as your father's daughter must know. Atrophy is the word in your jargon, isn't it?"

"Oh, all glory doesn't come through that mawkish muscle! I have lived for nineteen years without anything to try the holding capacity of mine, and I can go on for a while yet and get my glory through other channels."

"No, you can't, a woman's crown of glory comes through her heart or it isn't worth the wearing, her heart leads her reason, and is often the surer guide into the bargain."

"Why do you speak like this," said the girl, flushing, and flashing out a white

arm towards her, "on my coming-out night? It isn't fair of you!"

"You brought it on yourself, my Gwen, you're setting out on a wrong tack. Let yourself go, child, be natural and strive after—nothing. All good will come to you by Divine right."

A sudden chill ran down Mrs. Fellowes' back, and a horrid little song began to croon in her ears, "Through much tribulation" were the words of it, and it kept on by fits all that evening.

"Turn round again and let me look at you, dear. Ah, I feel as if it were the coming-out night of my own child!"

There was a quick short catch in her voice. "Kiss me, Gwen, and, darling, don't think of victory, there's blood in the very thought! The head and front of a

woman's life is love, God's, and mother's, and man's!"

"You've forgotten your audience," said Gwen sarcastically, "I know nothing of the two first, the third will come, I suppose, in time—by all accounts, it comes always to the beautiful—but I shall not know what on earth to do with it when it arrives, and oh! I don't want it! I want to 'live at full pitch', I couldn't manage that with my feet clogged with honey!"

"You want to be loved, my dear, to be loved, loved, loved, and when you are, you'll find out what an arrant little goose you are making of yourself."

The girl turned suddenly upon her and gave her one of her most volcanic hugs. When Mrs. Fellowes got out of it, panting,

she set to putting Gwen's dress in order with sundry soft touches to neck and arms.

"I do love nice soft girlish flesh," she said, with a little laugh. "Oh, how I do wish to goodness that John wasn't a parson this night of all others! I want dreadfully to see you there, but he can't come, it's impossible, you know Sam Tidd is dying and even for you I couldn't go without him!"

"Mrs. Fellowes!" she cried sweeping round, "are you not coming? This is, oh, this is awful! I never looked at your dress, I was so taken up with my own. Oh, to go alone with Lady Mary, and to my first ball!"

Her face was furious, and Mrs. Fellowes could have cried. "I did not tell you at

first, I was so astonished at your brilliant completeness, I *am* sorry."

Gwen stamped.

"It is atrocious, abominable! To go alone with no one in the room to care a rap how I look! You can't help it, I know, but oh, you must see the beastliness of the whole thing."

"The carriage is coming, darling, come down to your mother."

"I? Certainly not! Mary and Simpson!" she called.

"There, isn't it lovely?" said Gwen as Simpson wrapped her in her cloak, "I do love the sheeny changes in white plush! Mrs. Fellowes, you will come down with me, won't you? I hardly know Lady Mary."

When they came to the foot of the

stairs Mary came forward and said in a quick frightened tone,

“Miss Gwen, God bless you, dear! They will be proud of you! The room is well lighted, shall I open the door, Miss?”

“Did they ask for me?” demanded Gwen. She had let her cloak drop and was turning slowly round, that the old woman might have a good view of her.

“Ask, Miss!”—She broke off.

“I know they did not, and they don’t want me either, and Mrs. Fellowes isn’t coming—did you know that? I am glad you like me, Mary!”

She stooped suddenly seeing a tear on Mary’s cheek, and kissed it into a wet smudge on the bed of wrinkles, then she turned and kissed Mrs. Fellowes lightly, and walked down the great hall like a

young queen setting out on a triumphal progress.

When Gwen dropped her cloak and displayed herself for Mary's admiration, she had two spectators she certainly never bargained for.

A wave of the universal excitement had somehow reached Mr. and Mrs. Waring in their learned retirement, probably carried there by Mary's frequent appearances for trivial causes,—she dared not make any definite suggestion, for fear of Gwen's most inexorable wrath.

"My love," said Mr. Waring at last, "something unusual seems to be the matter!"

Mrs. Waring's brows knitted as usual, then gradually cleared.

"Yes, I really believe this is the occasion

of Gwen's first ball. I remember now Lady Mary mentioning something about it, and —ah, yes, don't you remember you gave Mrs. Fellowes a cheque for some dresses and other things to do with balls? Ah, nine o'clock, is it really? And I fancy I hear a carriage—didn't Lady Mary say she would come for her? I think, dear," she said, "I think, dear, I should like to see Gwen."

"And I too," said Mr. Waring, standing up with quiet eagerness, "shall we go to her room? I suppose we might do so," he added, half fearfully.

It certainly did seem rather a liberty on their part.

"Oh yes, I think that perhaps she might like it."

So they opened the door and were just

about to set forth when the sight of her in shimmering soft waves of silk and tulle, her round column of a neck poised like that of an empress, and her arms thrown out gracefully that Mary might see the whole of her, arrested the two and held them in a silent spell, standing hand in hand on the threshold. Then, hand in hand still, they went back into the library as if in a dream, and over to the deep embrasured window that opened on the carriage drive, and listened to the very last sound of Lady Mary's wheels. When they came back to the fire there was a tear in Mrs. Waring's eye, and her husband felt horrid—just as if he had lost a good thought.

CHAPTER XIV.

IF ever a girl's coming-out was a triumphal progress, Gwen's was. There was just the same suggestion of stifled groans, and hidden wounds, and silent blood streams in it, as there is in the processions of all conquerors, and just the same cool indifference to this part of the show distinguished the girl's face and added curiously to its charm.

As she swept calmly on her way her

victims fell to right and to left of her without a groan or a murmur, noisy appeal seemed quite out of the question in the presence of this magnificent inscrutable creature.

In her grand scornful way she revelled in the glory of her march, and wore her laurels as if she had been used to them since her long-clothes' days—this sort of thing just suited her, it was so thoroughly just, so fair, her mere due, and no more, and she felt neither elation nor any special gratitude in accepting it all.

For a whole year—first in the country, then in London—this went on, and Gwen never felt so unconsciously Christian-like in her life; she had no cause to rail against anything; she had no time to feel empty about the heart. Besides, her heart

was filled in a way with the steam from the victims sacrificed in her honour, and the intangibility of the stuffing didn't trouble her, it was warm and smelt like spikenard.

As for the feelings of the victims, these did not enter into her calculations, the whole show was so absolutely impersonal to her. For any pangs she might feel for the aloofness of the two she called father and mother, she had decided some time ago to smother these and to cast them out, harbouring and encouraging them never having altered or influenced the state of affairs by one finger's breadth.

She saw little of Mr. and Mrs. Fellowes in these days. The Scripture lessons had come to an end and she had turned the

whole subject into her mind's rubbish hole; what she had learned was sufficiently interesting at the time, but it had never come any farther than to the outer edge of her life, even when it was warmed and lighted by Mr. Fellowes' love for his subject and when the hours spent at the Rectory were the only bright flecks in the week's dinginess.

Now all these surroundings were withdrawn, the slight mist of glamour that used to hang round the subject had floated off, and Gwen was quite ready to shoot her stored-up accumulation of facts and deductions anywhere, to make room for more serviceable stuff. Only, what we have learned, good or bad, we must keep somewhere, God help us!

She was a clever girl, however, and

well-bred, and had read a good deal one way and the other, so she had the sense to hold her tongue and to keep her embryo opinions to herself. This made her equally magnanimous as regarded the opinions of her neighbours.

"Gwen's attitude of mind makes me quite sick," said Mrs. Fellowes one day, "that is, when she shows a glimpse of it, which isn't often nowadays. She hasn't had a volcanic outbreak for a century, they are ruinous to one's clothes, but I'd bear the spoiling of my new front for one this minute."

Mr. Fellowes laughed.

"There is a twist in her somehow and we have come to a nasty obstruction. When she is properly straightened she'll be a fine creature, but the untwisting

will be too gradual for you, my poor Ruth, you'll be worn out before it's finished."

"One would think she was a boa constrictor, I believe she has a touch of its nature too; she crushes hearts enough anyway, and with just as little compunction. I am sorry for young Patrick Hamilton, I love that boy."

"Which is no reason at all why Gwen should. The girl doesn't flirt, and he sought his crushing with open eyes. I believe it's the girl's brains as much as her beauty that dominates and reduces men's hearts."

"Very likely—the bigger fool a man is, the more he is vanquished by brain, especially if it keeps itself in the background and doesn't frighten him. He likes

the agreeable sensation of importance the possible possession of such a power gives him, and in his state of nervous tension, the creature is apt to get mixed and to imagine that the power he worships radiates somehow from him to his idol instead of contrariwise."

"A very comprehensive summary of our modes of thought, my dear, racy but untrustworthy. I don't, however, imagine that in Gwen's case any man is quite ass enough to imagine himself the source of her intellectual strength."

"Oh, perhaps not, Gwen's getting beyond me. If she goes on like this, between brains and beauty, she'll be no better than a charnel house for crushed hearts. Pah!"

"For the shadow of the things, not the

substance—do you imagine the victims haven't as firm a hold on their organs as ever they had? It's only an idea they lose half the times."

"Well, they make as much moan over it as if it were a very tangible flesh-and-blood article all bristling with nerves. I hate to look at Patrick's face, I wish he would go and shoot buffaloes, or take a tonic, or do anything but drink tea in that chair and draw sympathy out of me with those soft cowey eyes of his! He had only just left when you came."

"I should be glad for your digestion's sake if he would recover himself, you've swallowed three cups of tea in ten minutes."

"Yes, to wash out the memory of that boy!"

“Rather a roundabout way to go to work; if you don’t look out Pat’s heart will be sound long before your digestive organs are.”

“Never mind, they haven’t a tinge of Americanism about them, they haven’t so much as caught the accent. But how can you keep on being so hopeful of Gwen? I am downright miserable about her.”

“I have the greatest trust in the girl, my feeling about her is like faith, it is inexplicable, but it’s so natural, so instinctive and ingrained one feels its truth.”

“I suppose in the end she will marry,” said Mrs. Fellowes, “it’s the natural end or beginning of her.”

“Then—well, it’s not a very original

observation to make, but it's the only one that comes to my mind—God help her!”

“*God help him more!* Poor wretch, he'll want it all!”

CHAPTER XV.

HUMPHREY STRANGE gave a sort of snort, made for the window, and threw it open.

“Gru! This room is beastly, I’ll swear that window hasn’t been open for a month, the whole place is fusty with mildew. The beggar is drunk or the wire was delayed—I’ll have a fire anyway.”

By the way he went about making it, it was easy to see the man knew his work. First he shoved his stick up the

chimney to see if that was free, then he looked round.

“Plenty of kindling!” he muttered, pouncing on a band-box in the corner with a battered old hat in it. “Tolly’s, I’ll be bound, reeking with grease,—a direct interposition of Providence, this!”

He crushed it up, crammed it into the grate, and arranged broken pieces of band-box above it with mathematical precision, then he rummaged a broken chair out of an inner room, smashed the rotten legs across his knees, and added them to the heap, which at the first touch of the match shot into flame.

“It will clean the brutal air,” he remarked, “and it is quite cold enough for a fire. I wish I had stayed where I was till June. Tolly’s bout might have

been over by that time. Not so much as the smell of an oil rag here," he continued reflecting, "I must go out and forage."

Putting another chunk of chair on the fire and forcing a side window open with an ease that spoke well for his condition, he went out and returned shortly with a big knobbly parcel in one hand, and a smooth brown-paper one in the other.

From the first he produced a huge wedge of steak, some cut slices of ham, and a loaf of bread, the brown held a bottle of beer.

When the fire had burnt down to a hot bed of cinders, Strange put the tongs across it, the poker and a piece of thick wire he had poked out of a cupboard across these, then balanced the steak on

the top of this gridiron, and watched it fizzling and sputtering with a gratified air of expectancy.

“I left a gridiron, a saucepan, and a kettle in the bottom of that cupboard,” he mused, keeping a keen eye on the grill, “all in decent condition. Tolly again! I’ll put the fear of God in the fellow’s heart before to-morrow’s out, ‘That must be to-morrow, not to-night.’ A sell for me, my boy, if not for you, I feel just up to it now, by to-morrow the desire may have lost its savour. I must find something to put this steak on and to hold the beer. Not a sign of my pewter! Phew, one cracked glass! Lord! there were dozens! and one hot-water plate with half the delft off it, I could swear I left that shelf full of crockery! and

after this a Christian man is expected to do no murder!"

When he had got half through the slab of steak a strong thirst came on Strange.

"There is a cork-screw in one of my inner pockets," he reflected, looking lazily round, "never mind, this is shorter!"

He stretched out his arm for the poker, and with it, knocked the top of the bottle clean off and drank his beer with whole-some satisfaction.

When he had eaten and drunk enough, he pushed back his plate and glass, and took a bundle of quills and some MS. paper out of a small cabinet.

"Seemingly Tolly has found no use for these," he thought, as he sharpened a quill.

He then produced a bundle of smudgy

notes from an inner pocket and laid them by the paper.

“I’ll have a thorough good smoke,” he said, stretching his legs “and then I’ll be game for six hours’ work. I swear,” he continued, rubbing his hideous, inch-long, bristly, reddish beard, “I’ll not touch an individual bristle of this mat till Lynton has got his first consignment of ‘copy’, then I shall clean up and resume civilization.”

Strange was a good many things but he was above all others a traveller, he had neither nerves nor stomach, which is proof sufficient that he had been pre-ordained to the *rôle*, and he had discovered his election very early in life.

At the opening of one of his Eton vacations, when to look at he was a mere chit of a child with a pair of gray eyes

that were staggering from the sheer artlessness of them, he had dodged the parental eye at Waterloo, and instead of going down into Plowshire, he had taken ship at Rotherhithe, and had reached Amsterdam by the skin of his teeth, the tub being untrustworthy and nearly foundering in mid-channel.

When he came back, more artless than ever to look at, he knew as much of the life of the Hollanders of all classes and of every side of the life, moreover, as if he had dwelt among them for a round five years.

On his return to school he proceeded to record his experiences in the school organ, and on their appearance in that chaste journal, he was had up before his house master.

"Where did you hear all this, Strange?" demanded the scandalized gentleman.

"I saw it, sir, and it's quite true," was the artless reply.

"The deuce it is!" muttered Dr. Bromby. "That hardly betters matters. I have ordered every copy of this paper to be burnt, Strange," said the doctor severely, "and in future, I wish to look through your manuscript myself before it goes to the press. Unalloyed truth is sometimes out of place. Stick to your classics, Strange, you will write well some day, that is, if you become a little surer in your Latin, otherwise your English will always be slovenly. If I were you I should reserve some of my experiences, if you are in the habit of entertaining your fags with them in off-times," concluded the doctor.

“ Yes, sir,” said Humphrey, and departed cheerily.

Strange had just now come back unexpectedly from a long tour in Algeria. According to his own way of thinking he had had a glorious time if ever man had. He had lived in the tents of the Arabs, in the camps of the coast Zouaves, and in the hills and the deserts with the Bedouins, like David.

He had known

“ Of the plunge in a pool’s living water,
the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion
is couched in his lair,
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed
over with gold-dust divine,
And the locust flesh steeped in the pitcher,
the full draught of wine.”

He had braved heat, cold, hunger, thirst,
filth and squalor, fleas and worse than

fleas, snakes and beasts of prey, but he had learned a new variety of man and of the conditions that mould men's lives.

He had lived the life himself and could think as such men think, feel as they feel, speak and act as they do. He had gained a new power and felt a new growth of manhood quickening in his veins, and now he was recording what he knew.

Many travellers only *see* he *knew*. He had touched the core of the heart of things, and every word he wrote carried conviction to those who read and marvelled at the wonderful knack the fellow had of telling primitive truths cleanly.

Strange kept his word and worked without break for six hours on end, then he tumbled off his seat with sudden sleep, having just sense enough to first roll

himself in his Ulster. When Tolly arrived next morning at eleven o'clock, the delayed wire in his hand and his hair erect with terror, he found his master snoring in a strong breeze, with the full sun on him, and at least a pound of dried grease all over the fender. Tolly groaned.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOLLY proceeded in a vague sort of scurry to clear up. But in general confusion of conscience and in his gin-begotten shakiness, he presently dropped the poker with a clatter, and Strange awoke and sat bolt upright in his Ulster.

“ Well, Tolly, how do you feel?” he demanded blandly, regarding the forlorn, dirty figure with a persistent and contemplative stare that caused it to wriggle and writhe like a worm.

Tolly was a very long, thin, crooked person, whether young or old it was impossible to decide, unless you happened to have seen his baptismal register.

His mother herself was rather at sea on the question. "He has always looked like that from a baby," she remarked to the school inspector, when he called one day to round up the urchin, who from his lanky length certainly looked quite meet for Primers. "I don't believe myself he's that old but he may be, there ain't no tellin', he's that queer one can't never say nothin' certain regardin' him."

Tolly's freckles were his great point, they were so many, so parti-coloured and so varied in form; they congregated most on his long thin nose, and tumbled over one another in a way that gave the

appendage a scaly look like the tail of a fish. Tolly's teeth suffered from early decay; he may have had a few back-grinders but all he could boast of in front was one abnormally long fang at the right side, that wobbled frightfully at every word, and when he was nervous from gin wobbled even when he was silent.

"If I remember aright," continued Strange, "you took the pledge the night before I left, you cried too—let alone roared—with remorse."

"Yes, sir, I don't deny nothin'."

"I'd like to catch you at it! Well, how long did you keep the pledge?"

"I believe it were a matter of three weeks, sir, then I cotched cold."

"Oh, indeed! And the gin cotched you? Now, clear up that place. I shall cook

breakfast myself. When you have put things ship-shape from my point of view, not yours, recollect, I shall give you sixpence, then you can go to the baths round the corner and scrub yourself from head to foot. Your things—except the hat, I burnt that, you appear to have stored dripping in it—are in the box I gave you, put them on and then wait here for me. That gridiron, those tumblers, those cups and other things you have smashed or pawned, you will buy out of your next three weeks' wages—Farris's gin-hole has all your savings, no doubt. And to-night I shall give you a dose of castor oil mixed with senna."

"Oh, Lord help me!" groaned Tolly, and he shuffled nearer to his master, with his slits of lips drawn tight across his

fang—he had experienced Strange's treatment before this.

“Now stop groaning, and do your work, neither I nor the Lord would touch you with a pair of tongs in your present beastly condition! You have earned your punishment and of course you shall get it. If you lived decently you would have a first-rate place and you know it, and, look here, I have come to the end of my patience, if I find you in this state again, I shall sack you.”

Tolly gave an anguished squeal.

“Oh, I'll try, sir, I does try, I swear to God I does. I tries, I does, till I sweats like a bullock and doesn't know if I'm on my head or my heels, but summow it ain't no go. Don't sack me, for the love of God, don't, sir.”

“Finish your sweeping, and go over that place under the table again. I shall see how you get on after the bath and the castor oil.

“Poor beggar!” said Strange to himself, as he ate his ham and drank his well-sweetened tea. “Poor beggar! I wonder if I shall ever make anything out of him! Only that the creature is so weakly—look at the miserable hold of his claws on that dustpan!—I should take him about with me, the Arabs would teach him sobriety anyway and he might pose as an apostle of Christianity among them.”

At this thought Strange chuckled aloud, and helped himself to another slice of ham.

Tolly’s face brightened as he heard the

sound, he turned furtively to watch his earthly Providence, and went on with his dusting with redoubled fury.

“Now,” said Strange, when he had finished, “carry all these things into the next room and have a good feed. When did you happen to have your last meal?”

On the point of truth Strange was inexorable; the fellow dared not lie, but he had a sort of bastard pride about him and felt the question keenly. Turning a sickly puce, he stammered,

“I haven’t had nothing yesterday, sir, summow I didn’t feel like it.”

“No? Well, if I were you I’d cultivate the feeling now. Send in the barber on your way to the bath, and hand down that ink bottle from the shelf before you go. Pah! you can’t even fill an ink bot-

tle, your hand shakes so! Upon my word, if I have to sack you I don't know what you'll do, you aren't worth fourpence a week in this condition."

Tolly gave a dumb shudder and his fang kept time to it.

Five years before, Strange had picked him up out of a sewer, where he went to learn the trade of ratting. Strange liked to learn the ins and outs of anything that had any suggestion of human interest in it.

He had brought the half-dead, mouldy creature to his rooms, and after saving his life, it struck him to keep it, and see what could be done with it. This was the result.

As long as Strange was at home Tolly kept straight, but directly he was out of

reach, the miserable absorbing craving took hold of the wretch, and pinched, and pulled, and nipped, as with raging hot irons, at the very soul of him, till at last he swallowed his humanity at a gulp, gave way to the beast, and fled to the gin-shop.

For three weeks he had endured the torture this last time, Strange thought with grim pity, as he watched him, through the heavy Eastern curtains, devouring his food to the dropping of tears.

“Poor beggar! I shall never be able to get rid of him as long as life holds whatever morsel of soul he may have in him. Meanwhile, I cannot stand that solitary fang; when he has got over his brew I shall get him a set of teeth.”

He lay back and laughed. “They’ll be

the ruin of his immortal soul, those teeth; fancy the grin of the fellow when his lips have a resisting surface to stretch across! Brown will charge frightfully for filling such a cavern."

He laughed again and turned to his work, and in two hours he had the first batch of "copy" ready for the printer. Then he yawned and stretched, and apologized to the barber, whom he had kept waiting an hour and ten minutes.

When he was shaved, he dressed, and set forth to resume civilization.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN he got outside his rooms, which were in a turning off Piccadilly, Strange looked up and down the street and at his watch.

“I shall not bother with luncheon, that ham will last till eight,” he said, “I shall go to the Club and I suppose I must see Aunt Moll. I’ll go there to tea, she’ll be up probably, and perhaps awake by that time.”

He struck out for his Club and made a rapid tour of the premises but he found there was no good to be got there, the billiard-rooms were empty and the reading-rooms were given over to half a dozen old fellows suffering from gout and senile decay.

“It’s too early and too late for anything,” he muttered, as he lighted a fresh cigar on the steps, “it will be a full week, besides, before I get into the swing again. I shall try Brydon.”

With that he swung off down the street, past some big thoroughfares, then he cut across a mesh of alleys and courts, out into some dingy squares, landing at last in Bloomsbury Square. He walked round till he got to a tall narrow house in a corner, where he pulled up, pushed open

the door, which was ajar, and went upstairs to the fifth story where he found a door with "Mr. Brydon" painted on it in big letters. He opened it, and walked in.

A big fair boy with a cigarette in his mouth was sitting before an easel, touching up a background; he spoke in a soft tired voice without 'turning an inch of himself.

"Excuse me, Carry, I can't possibly stand up, I am wrestling with a curtain. Kindly sit down and begin your apologies. Was Ma's 'neuralgy' bad, or the baby? Was it 'it'? I am not quite certain as to the sex of the last.—By the way, don't they come with undue speed, those babies, or do you spread all the diseases out on one?—Or did Pa go for you and render your nose unfit for immortality? Two hours behind

time to-day, that's nothing to you in the day's work, no doubt, but I may remark that it's slightly inconvenient to me, as I prefer daylight to dark to catch the super-excellent tones of your skin."

"I should have thought on the whole that the glow——"

"Strange!" he cried with a soft slow gurgle of intense delight, and lifting himself clumsily up from his seat, he caught Strange's hand in a close clasp and pushed him back into an old frilled arm-chair.

"I thought you were in Algeria. It was a dangerous experiment, old fellow; the betting was ten to one that I was painting off a model, and I am continually overlooking that lock. You're only just back, I see. What a glorious dusty smooth

red you've got on your cheeks! For goodness sake, let me have it before gas and sich play the deuce with it."

"Take it, my child, take it. What a pity you didn't have the beard too! that was a far more glorious red, and a sight dustier, but I parted with it this morning."

"Thank you, I've seen your bristles once; I never wish to behold them again. Now smoke, and I'll just have a shy at catching that tint, it's precisely what I want for this beggar's cheek. My model had it to perfection, but they clapped him into quad for prigging saveloys, and when he comes out he will be useless, the colour of bad paste."

"Your room's hardly serious enough; it's pretty, in a doll's-house style."

"Serious! I can't afford that. One

can't extract seriousness from rags, but the colours are good and the cost small. Look at the drapery hiding the crack in the wall in that corner, fourpence-halfpenny the yard and a reduction by the piece!"

"And you probably went dinnerless for that!" thought Strange, watching the tall heavy-looking fellow, with his straight, limp brown hair hanging over his forehead in a way that gave him a queer, foolish look, an effect that his big alive eyes were constantly contradicting.

The soft, sleepy tones of his voice which, only that they happened to be peculiarly clear, would never have been heard at all, added rather to this effect. Strange, however, was quite aware that the eyes of the fellow spoke the truth, and

that the hair and the soft speech lied.

His father had been curate in the parish where Strange's father was the Squire, and even then the big boy had been good to the little one, and the unequal friendship was still kept up between the two. It was a pleasant little corner in the life of the older man, it was the best part of life to the boy, and no one had a notion of the intense love and gratitude he bore to the big notable man who took the trouble to know him.

Strange had stood by him in the bad crisis of his life, when things had come to a head and his father, the curate, had put down his foot and damned art permanently, and the boy, for his part, had comprehensively damned the church, and had then stepped out of the parental

porch with a five-pound note in his pocket, and in his eyes the yearning greed for colour.

“How are you getting on?” said Strange.

“Oh, I live, and I hardly owe a thing, which is a consolation, in case I happened to die off in a hurry, and had to be beholden to the governor to fork up. I have no feelings at all about the funeral expenses or the shroud, I shall make no provision for these, they seem in his line, somehow. But it would cut the old man up frightfully if he had to pay the models or the beer, or anything smacking of the devil, you know—Would you mind turning your face an inch to the right?”

“What are you at? Haven’t you got the brick-dust yet?”

“Yes, in a way, but I want to sketch

you,” said Brydon, measuring him with his pencil, “I won’t be long; you look so cool, and big, and ‘kinder’ dogged, you’ve given me a notion. You’ve grown frightfully since you went away, especially about the eyes, they’ve got so beastly deep and intricate, why don’t you have eyes like decent God-fearing mortals?”

“Ask my parents; if they refuse you the information, I can only refer you to my godfather and godmother—By the way, what’s wrong with you, Charlie?”

“Me!—Nothing!—I had another bout of rheumatic fever a month ago, and I have felt a trifle stodgy since at times, especially after a grind up these stairs.”

“Heart!” thought Strange. “Poor beggar! it’ll be hard on him if he’s carried off

before he learns to draw. Will you dine with me to-day?"

Brydon's face lit, he had ecstatic memories of dinners with Strange, and as a matter of fact his dinners for two days past, had consisted of bread—and mustard to give it a relish.

"Thank you, old man, I can't—I can't go anywhere till Friday."

"Why, in Heaven's name?"

"I have some black and white to do," he said mixing some paint hurriedly.

Strange took a glance at his back view and shrugged his shoulders.

"The beggar's sure to let it out, he always does," he reflected.

After a few minutes' silent painting Brydon turned round.

"I generally tell you most things," he

said, "if you wait long enough, and you know by this time what an abject ass I am, so you may as well hear the climax.

"I was down sketching in Surrey last month. I went after the fever—I didn't feel as if I could stand the stairs just then—and I found a girl in a cottage there who was willing to sit for me whenever I wanted her. She was—divine! Look!" he got up slowly and took a little canvas from behind the door. "Look! Did Greuse ever have such a head to paint from? I fell in love with her. Of course, it was that colour that did it; that, and her poses, and all her little ways and movements, and her soft little voice—oh—oh—you know the sort of fool I am! I lodged at her mother's house, and the pair nursed

me as if I were a sick cat—well—Look! —I had to leave that place at a moment's notice or I don't know what might have happened—you know. I paid up and cleared.

“Would you believe it, I hadn't been home a week, when who should appear one night past ten o'clock but that girl? Upon my word, I broke out in a cold sweat all over. I'm as weak as water, and—she was divine. I tell you—I had an awful job altogether. I quieted her down first, then I had to bathe her feet, such pretty pink little ones, but all torn and bruised. If you believe me, she had walked from ten miles this side of Godalming. I got her some food and gave her up my bed, and somehow or other I got her back next day; she'd have stayed on any terms,

poor little soul! Girls are queer fish," he said modestly, "one never can tell what'll fetch them. It was all pretty hot on the mother, however, so I gave her the few shillings I had, and then she wrote to say that the girl got fever from the walk, so of course I've had to help them, and I regret to say my boots have gone for a change to mine uncle's. I shall be paid on Friday, and then I'll bloom back into my pristine glory and accept invitations.

"I wonder," he went on reflectively, "if there's any way of keeping a fellow from making a fool of himself. If you have happened to hear of any in your travels, an anti-love philtre now, for Heaven's sake divulge it, it ruins one's work getting in love in a promiscuous way, it's a brutal

nuisance too, and devilish expensive. I know I always have to pay compound interest for my pleasures in this line, and they're absolutely mawkish too, in their innocence," he added, with a little injured sigh.

Strange watched the boy curiously, wondering what possible motive, or train of motives, combined to keep his life so clean, with its every condition on the side of uncleanness.

"He has neither convictions nor religion to hold him, he is as passionate and sensual a fellow as any going, he is steeped to the lips in Zola and others of that ilk; theoretically, innocence and he are as far apart as the poles. He is a fool, no doubt, but I wish to God the folly would last."

Brydon guessed the elder man's thoughts,

or perhaps his own were running on the same lines, as he sketched in the strong steady cool face with a breadth of technique that was marvellous in a boy of his age and opportunities.

“I wonder myself,” he said, “I don’t make more of my pleasures. A fellow has opportunities somehow,” he added with pleasing diffidence, “no matter how poor he is but I have a sort of notion I might lose in Art what I should gain in pleasure. It would be idiotic to run that risk, wouldn’t it? I have a sort of theory, it’s probably rot though it has a sound of truth about it, that the cleaner one keeps one’s body and soul, the clearer one’s eyes keep and the better able to tackle the truth in Nature.”

He paused, a little embarrassed; any

expression, even of the most primitive morality, brings a blush of shame to the cheek of youth.

"That sounds like a workable theory," assented Strange, "and upon my word, I believe you will find it so. The opposite is playing the deuce with the modern Italian school, and it strikes one like a blow in a lot of the work of the youngsters there. I would thresh out that theory, if I were you, nothing half and half will do."

"No," said Brydon ruefully, "no, that is where the grind comes in."

Strange laughed, the fellow's face and accent fitted his speech so comically.

"I suppose I must let him get over the boot business himself, he's so beastly cocky, but I'm convinced he's hungry. I wonder how much the jade got out of him! Charlie,"

he then said aloud, "I must be off, I shall expect you on Friday at my Club. If I were you, old chap, I should stop that young person's supplies, the fever must be off her by this time."

"I have a sort of awful conviction that it's going to be intermittent, and that nothing but a change of address will have any effect upon it—but, oh, old man, if you could have seen that girl," he concluded regarding her head mournfully, with his own on one side, and with an overwhelming longing for the Egyptian flesh-pots surging up within him.

Strange slapped him on the shoulder, "Just as well not, fevers come expensive, whether they take you, or the victim to your charms. Good-bye."

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